

The Queen was in the Kitchen



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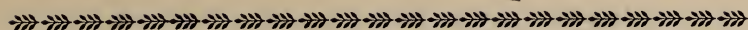


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*The Queen was
in the Kitchen*



DAPHNE ALLOWAY McVICKER



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in the Kitchen*

Whittlesey House

MCGRAW-HILL BOOK COMPANY, INC.

New York

London

THE QUEEN WAS IN THE KITCHEN

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FOR
VINTON AND LAUREL AND JIMMY AND
BLYTHE AND AGNES

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*The Queen was
in the Kitchen*

1. *Refined Girl Wanted*

IT ALL BEGAN BECAUSE OF THE LETTER FROM THE magazine.

The postman came up on the porch, the mailbox fell down with a cheery crash, steps resounded furiously going away, and Skip and Toby and I came out of hiding.

We hid every day when the postman came. The front wall of our one-floor bungalow was brick. Into this brick, Tom, my husband, had attempted to insert screws to hold the shiny tin mailbox. The screws wouldn't stay, they made bigger and bigger holes, and the mailman swore loud, terrible oaths every time he shoved a batch of mail into the box. My four-year-old daughter Skip and I were afraid of him, and eighteen-months-old Toby did everything we did, so we all stayed behind the dining room door till the mailman went away.

On this day, we rushed out and captured the letter and I opened it. We did everything together, in a peculiarly formed body consisting of me, Toby grasping my leg at his own level, and Skip hanging to any loose portion of me.

The letter seemed to say that an editor had liked my story, would buy it for a hundred dollars, and would like to see more.

When I came back to consciousness, Toby was sobbing

because Skip had smacked him and Skip was sobbing because, she told Toby, "Hush, Grandpa's dead."

That was because of the other time I'd read a letter and acted this way. That time, Grandpa had been hurt. This time—I explained to Skip, beaming—was very different. We were rich, I told her, we would buy her a new scooter and probably a new car. The story had taken me five hours—a hundred dollars every five hours was, roughly, five hundred dollars a day. If I hurried extra fast the last hour.

We telephoned Tom to tell him, but we must have been a little incoherent, because when he rushed home he brought the doctor with him. It seems he thought Skip had been run over. The doctor, whom we called Bill out of office hours, because he had been in college when we were, joined us in a cup of coffee and a plate of sardines and rejoicing.

"Now," Tom told me, "you'll have to have Help."

Both of us talking at once, we described to Bill the day I wrote the story.

It just sort of came to me, and that impressed me very much. I decided I was one of those women whose pictures appear in magazines, in large black hats and soulful eyes. Things had begun coming to me.

I had written the story rapidly on Tom's ancient Underwood. After a while, Toby stopped pushing the carriage back each time I tried to move it. After a while, I stopped saying "Yes, darling" to Skip. The splendor of my notion had swept me out of the world and I had finished the story in a glorious swoop.

But after that, I looked around. Toby had decided to help me, he had painted all the gray plastered walls with Tom's toothbrush dipped in blacking. And Skip hadn't stopped him, because she was down the street being beaten up by the little Marsh boy. Tom brought her in,

tear-stained, bloody, and ferocious. "I got even with him, though," Skip said, and we beamed on her. That was the old spirit, we'd always taught her to take her own part. "I got a big rock and I threw it through their front door."

But, Tom told Bill now, it was a swell story just the same. He'd thought so when he read it and made me send it away to a publisher. "The only thing is," Tom told the doctor, "Sally needs some help around the house."

Bill agreed. He joined us in our cold supper of baked beans and rather dry bread, and he made a comment that always enraged us.

"You two kids started everything too fast anyhow," Bill told us, and I threw a bread crust at him, which I shouldn't have done, because Skip and Toby joyously hurled all the rest of them.

We *hated* being told we'd started everything too soon.

Everything moved fast in those years that staggered from the frightening era of the First World War. Lots of our friends who had been dating on the beautiful Ohio State campus went off to die. Even though Tom's enlistment sent the Kaiser running for Holland and the war was over, we'd been frightened by that speeding up of life and death. Tom was editor of the college paper at Ohio State, the job paid fifty dollars a month. We thought we might as well get married. After all we were both geniuses who meant to write the world's great books one day, we couldn't see why we should wait.

"We'll have a little house," we planned, "with twin studies. And a maid to do the housework. . . ."

Everybody in our whole world gave us advice. We were like Kipling's Elephant's Child with his advising relatives, with everybody spanking him. Professors scolded us, friends warned us.

"The thing is . . ."—they whispered this because in

those days you didn't say such things aloud—"if Sally should have a baby. . . ."

And, of course, Sally did. Right away, as fast as she could get round to it. That was one of the reasons we'd thought up getting married. We had a year first of chaperoning every dance on the campus, and there was a newspaper job at fifteen dollars a week. Postwar prices soared, eggs were a dollar a dozen, and coal was a commodity that couldn't be had. We lived precariously in "rooms for light housekeeping" and ate charred hot dogs off beautiful china with salad forks, because our wedding presents had not been discriminating.

And then prosperity zoomed overnight. A publicity organization offered Tom twice the salary he was making, and he had an office and stationery with his name on it. And I had a baby.

"Buy your own home," advertisements commanded. "Small down payment and balance like rent."

That sounded logical. Besides, light housekeeping people wouldn't have Skip. And we'd taken quite a fancy to her, we intended to keep her. She was already paid for—a little money had accumulated every month from the gap between Tom's new salary and his old one. We assumed this would continue.

So we took a meager sum and we bought a one-floor bungalow.

It glistened and gleamed—it had hardwood floors and glass doors, a tile bath, and not one, but two, mortgages. It had a long living room and a window seat and an unexpected capacity for swallowing our few pieces of furniture, leaving no trace.

That first year, it was all we could wish for. Only the future was to show what happened to a one-floor-plan when its one floor sagged under scooters, bikes, baby buggies, baseball bats, roller skates, beds.

Only the future showed us what happened to a balance like rent when it had to spread over house paint, wall-paper, bursting plumbing, broken windows, vanishing roof shingles, a fence around the dog and the baby, a garage.

"And a maid to do the housework—" I couldn't quite lose track of that dream. Because, try as I might, the housework kept ahead of me, a black, gloomy, unyielding mass. I could tell Skip stories and read to her, we could shout with laughter together. I could scribble down a poem about her that started out, "A baby set with sapphires, twin stars that glow with light." I could sell it for three dollars and buy Skip the Raggedy Ann doll with the real candy heart inside her. But I couldn't keep my windows shining, my porches scrubbed, my floors waxed, my potatoes peeled, my beds made, my dishes washed.

Maybe, I thought now and then, maybe some of those people knew what they were doing when they said we were starting too soon. But that was a thought that vanished when Skip's first spoken word was "star," when we tucked her into her crib, a beaming, rotund bundle at night, when we sat on the porch and dreamed ourselves across the world.

Someday, when we had some Help. . . .

Encouraged by the tidy dreams we evolved on that hypothesis, we had another baby. The extra money from Tom's salary vanished like the frost Skip loved on our windowpanes. I'd produced my seven-pound Skip quite efficiently, but a ten-pound Toby left me languid and a little damaged physically, with some expensive repair jobs indicated. And since we'd started housekeeping with two cheese knives and only four sheets, a gorgeous silver vase and one tablespoon, and similarly disproportioned possessions, we'd had to draw heavily on Tom's salary for the everyday equipment of life.

Those other people—those people who waited a while—had seven hundred dollars saved for table and bed linen. They had a thousand dollars to buy a lot. We had a beautiful silver Thermos jug which two of my disappointed suitors had sent us with a reproachful little card inscribed "From the Alumni Chapter"; but we didn't have an ironing board till we'd been married three years.

So there wasn't any money. "Small down payment," we found, gave us title to the house. This sounded glorious till we found that the perquisites of this splendor were the right to pay the taxes, to keep the place in complete repair, to call an expensive plumber for every leaky faucet.

Some of the people we'd been in college with were escaping to New York, to Bohemianism, to the beginnings of Fame. I looked at my thin, smiling Tom over the heads of my seventy-five pounds of beaming blond children, and scoffed at escape; but I looked at my dusty floors and sighed.

So then I wrote the story. A hundred dollars. A hundred dollars every five hours forever. If I could just get Help—

"We could pay a little," Tom said. "Five dollars a week or so. And give her her living. We could get it out of the budget somehow, it would just be a gamble till you began to sell enough stuff to pay more."

And thus was born in our heads the notion of our Refined White Girl, the idea of our Maid.

We edited our first notions. The vision of something winsome in gray sateen with floating white streamers ("I'd pinch her behind the door," Tom said wistfully)—that picture disappeared.

As did my dream of a soft-voiced minion murmuring, "Madame's breakfast in bed," because that vision included a lot of little hot silver dishes we didn't own anyhow.

"We'll get somebody who really *needs* a home," we planned.

And so she began to take shape, that shy, lovely girl, coming forward reluctantly, her eyes wide with delight at the sight of us. She stood almost breathing on our threshold, staring at the rows of books which ranged from *The Little Colonel's Christmas Vacation* to Wells' *Outline of History*. "She'll *always* have wanted books," I said. "She'll take them to bed and commune with the masters—" We could see her falling asleep with a shy smile on her face.

"Of course she'd have to sleep in Skip's room," I said thoughtfully. That one-floor-plan had rather contracted by now. "On that couch your Aunt gave us—but with a *lot* of padding and the head propped up."

We bereft our young guest of any bed at all in her past life. Probably she'd had to lie on bare boards with, perhaps, a ragged blanket under her.

"She wouldn't have to do everything—"

Where she'd come from, we knew, she'd been expected to do everything. We saw a fragile figure bent under logs that she was dragging to the fire. She had been up since dawn, cooking for a snarling gang of men. She had made all of the beds and scrubbed the floors, she'd cooked, she'd cleaned and washed dishes, baked rows of pies and cakes. Now, incredulous, she looked about our pleasant home, nothing to do but—

"Get breakfast," I pondered. "Dress Skip and Toby and get you off. Sometimes, maybe, I'll even lie asleep a little—"

"You always do anyhow," Skip put in unnecessarily.

"But it hurts my conscience," I retorted. "Then she'll do up the dishes and maybe fix me a little something—"

Again she took almost visible shape in my thoughts. I saw her, hesitant, at the door of my study. The study itself, I'd had to dream up at this moment, in a hitherto

unnoticed part of the house, and I draped it with cool curtains blowing in a rose-scented breeze. Reluctant to disturb my muse, the girl hovered.

"You *must* eat—" She was laughingly insistent, bringing me a tray with a single flower floating in a blue pottery bowl.

I ran through the other hours of her day, lightly studded with exercising the puppy, bathing Toby, dressing him, and cleaning up Skip—oh, getting a couple of light lunches for the children, flitting about with a duster, lifting a precious vase and staring at it with the glow of rapture in her thin little face.

"She'd have to do the tricornes," Tom asserted.

She certainly would. Toby's tricornes, so euphemistically called, encumbered the earth. This was years before diaper services and even before scientific housebreaking. Toby, who could walk briskly and say lots of words, was still serenely oblivious to the possibilities of moving into nice little pants. His tricornes lay in mountains in the basement, they filled all available tubs and basins, they were stacked, dry, for "smoothing off with the iron." At this present moment, for instance, Toby had solved the problem momentarily by stepping out of his current one and racing merrily about with flashing pink glimpses, his tricorne over his arm like a basket.

Sometimes I felt that I could face life again, a carefree girl, if I could dodge that avalanche of Toby's pants.

The radio screamed out static, announcements, and a thread of music. Wouldn't a radio be a joy to our little helper? She'd never have heard anything like it. Nobody ever had, I reflected bitterly, as it began a werewolf howl caused by the regenerating set next door. We'd all saved money for a year to buy Tom that radio, and although once he had got Cuba, usually it simply played a horrible witches' chorus to all our discussions.

"Let's see," Tom's brow furrowed a little and he took a sheaf of ruled papers out of his pocket, "how much could we manage to pay?"

Skip took Toby quietly by the hand and they vanished. "It's the budget," I heard her whisper, and Toby paled. Skip regarded the budget as a thing quite like the ogre in her fairy books, as indeed it was. It left Tom silent and lip-biting, it made me storm and often weep.

"By using my overcoat fund—"

"We used it," I said sadly, "for the Marshes' broken front door. We used Recreation for the lawn mower and Religion for the subscription to the stadium. We ate Savings the night Dick and Mary came to dinner."

"Yes," Tom said, "I see. Well, by spreading that hundred of yours out—"

We pretended we could do that. "I wouldn't," Tom said severely, "ask anybody to work for a pittance unless it was someone who actually needed a home. But if there were someone like that, really in need of a nice place to stay, I should think a house like this and all we could give her, and just a few dollars a week would be fine."

"Of course!" I agreed blithely. "And look, I'm only asking her to do some of the things I'm already supposed to be doing, and I'll still do all the rest besides, and then I'll write, too."

Put that way, it didn't make us feel so like a pair of grim Legrees. And when Tom began to draft the advertisement, the children crept hopefully back, for we beamed over it.

The radio howled, Toby seized Tom's pencil, Skip brought scissors to make paper dolls out of the paper he was writing on, but in the midst of this frenzy we evolved the ad.

And thus we entered the reign of the Refined White

Girl. It was to last for fifteen years. It seemed doubtful that I would last so long.

We read the ad proudly aloud to Skip the next evening: "Wanted as mother's helper in small family, refined young white girl, to do light housework and assist with two children. Full privileges of charming home, room and board, and small salary."

Skip's hot little hand clutched my arm suddenly and I saw big, anxious blue eyes fixed on me.

"You'll still be my mother, won't you?" she demanded.

Reassured as to this, she, too, listened with pleasure. And she, Toby, and I were on the front porch when the first applicant marched up the slope to where our bungalow commanded a view of the street. When we had moved here, our house was one of a half dozen scattered along this new suburban street. We had gazed on green, weed-filled spaces, we had staked out a proprietary claim on a redbird. Imagine paying like rent for a redbird!

Within two months, no sound but the scream of the saw and the lusty roar of the riveter broke the stillness. Families, crammed and doubled over in wartime emergency into cramped quarters, were beginning to expand and building was booming. Every wedded pair in town was ready to pay a small amount down. Small, box-like houses grew on our street like magic. Hammers called to their mates. Skip teetered on rafters.

So, this morning, we had seated ourselves on the porch and were shrieking at one another when we saw the stout female trudging up the hill. "Look at that ugly woman," Skip commanded with her customary alarming forthrightness. When she mounted our very steps, Toby vanished and Skip and I cowered. One of those sets of books, I thought in anguish, for I always bought them.

I could never think of the answers to accusing agents

who told me it was my duty to the children to educate them from this splendid set of books. Craven murmurs about our budget did no good—you could make a small down payment.

I always did. We owned portions of *Journeys Through Bookland*, we had made a deposit on *The Child's Encyclopaedia*. Our shelves bulged with instructions for Skip about intimate biology, with predigested fables and brightly illustrated science and history. Skip preferred a small battered *Peter Rabbit* and the newspaper serial. I had unwisely lulled her one desperate bedtime with that and she adored it.

But this wasn't a set of books coming up the hill. This was our Refined White Girl.

"Great oafs," I told Tom feebly that night, "from little tricornes grow."

I had planned to make our shy young applicant at home, interviewing her, perhaps, over a cup of tea. Skip and Toby would be frolicking on the rug in fresh sunsuits, the long rays of the sun lighting up earnest little faces.

This first creature took the conversation in hand. She was a large, fierce woman with rigidly marcelled hair and glittering eyes.

"We better go in the house, I can't hear a word you say," she told me. "Sure is a racket out here, ain't they?"

Her uplifted nose commented silently on our living room, cheerily undusted and buried under last night's apple cores and newspapers. "One of those women," her glance described me, "out on the porch a-ready and her housework not done."

"Them the children? Oh, that one's too little, I wouldn't work where there's a baby. Wet the bed, does he? I thought so."

Toby, abashed, hurriedly removed convincing proof of

this evil addiction, and his shamed person, into the kitchen.

"The girl, too, she likely has to have all special stuff to eat."

Skip looked grimly around for a weapon, and I clung hard to her wrist.

"No, I couldn't do it. Away out here, too. It's an hour's streetcar ride. You'd have to pay carfare."

I gulped. "We wanted somebody to make her home with us—"

"Oh, I couldn't stay on the place. I never do that. And no laundry, of course. Cooking, I do plain cooking, see, but I'd expect you to help. And every Sunday off. And Thursdays. And I don't do no heavy work, see—my back. The doctor says he don't know when he's *seen* a back like mine."

How I should love to see it now, I thought.

"What's the pay?"

I told her. And that finished the interview. She said two words, she said, "Oh, *my!*" Her broad back was still quivering as it sailed down the street.

I tried to find Toby, to change him, but someone was knocking at the door again. This time it was a plump, panting, eyeglassed pink person, much better dressed than I—who wore a pink bungalow apron, and not much else, most of the time. The visitor, resplendent in a transparent waist and a jaunty suit, waved me into the living room and seated herself.

"You don't need to say a word," she told me. "I know exactly what you want."

I wanted to go to bed. I wanted to go hide in the closet, as Toby was doing. I wanted day before yesterday. But I couldn't have it.

"Not a servant at all," the visitation beamed. "I know. You're just too sensitive, you couldn't stand one. That

class around. You want a friend—somebody to buddy around with. To help some—wash the dishes, maybe, and stay with the dear kiddies sometimes when you want to run away.”

Never had I so yearned to run away as now, but the eyes behind gold-rimmed eyeglasses held me fixed.

“Well—it was a little more than that—some of the cooking, we thought—”

“I’m not much of a cook.” Laughter bubbled up. “My first husband said I couldn’t boil an egg without spoiling it.” She shouted with merriment at this remembered wit, and Skip shouted too. From next door came the crash of hammers and the roar of some sort of plastering machine. The mailbox fell down on the porch. Through the kitchen door, where Toby was now roaming unchecked, came a crash that outdid all the other clamor. I identified it as either my grandmother’s willow platter or Toby and wondered which I would regret more.

“But we’d get along—”

Good heavens, we were being hired. I foresaw day on awful day of buddying with this creature, of hearing nifties from the day of her first husband, of being clasped to her cushioned bosom. “We’d manage. I always say, live and let live. I’d have my ways and you’d have yours. Could I see my room?”

The hushed words told me what to expect. She had in mind some chintz-hung boudoir with a tinted Cecil DeMille bath recessed there. Canopies over the bed, probably, and deep chairs, and cages with prisoned birds singing. She followed me and stood in silence as I pointed to the couch in Skip’s room, splendidly boosted up at the back though it was. Raggedy Ann lay prostrate on it. Skip had taken the mattress off her own bed and made a house with it, and two bright airedale eyes looked out of the

tepee opening. Tasteful heaps of cut-out paper dolls strewn the floor.

My buddy was not amused. We weren't hired.

I closed the front door on her and rushed to the kitchen. Toby had the flour bin in the kitchen cabinet pulled open and was mixing a fine cement in it. He was going patiently back and forth with cups of muddy water from a scrub bucket under the sink.

"Mother," Skip came cowering in to crouch beside me, "there's an old crone at the door."

Terrified, we all peered out.

There were old crones in Skip's books, and this creature at our door was indeed one. She was about eight feet high, she wore an assemblage of greenish, dangling garments under a man's sweater, which buttoned across a saucy net blouse. She pounded on the door with a purposeful fist.

"Skip," I whispered. "I'm going crazy—"

From beside me lifted a frenzied roar.

"Toby go," Toby demanded. "Toby go too—"

Around the house, seeking us, tracking us down, came the fateful tread of the old crone's footsteps.

2. Miss Flower Jones

TOM," I SUGGESTED AT BREAKFAST A FEW DAYS LATER, "I think I'll go away for a while. Go to Mother's. For a nice long visit."

"Your mother's in Florida," Tom reminded me, surveying his brief case, which was unfortunately damp because Toby had been sitting on it. "And unless you write another story—"

I said "Ha!" in a tone which was intended to be bitter.

The skillet in which I was frying eggs caught fire, Toby and Skip did an Indian dance around it, I extinguished it with an embroidered dish towel, and Tom, snatching the opportunity, kissed everybody all round and vanished.

Write another story, I muttered, attempting to interest Toby in a fine new piece of furniture I had recently purchased for him, a wicker chair with an oval section cut out of the seat. Write another story! Toby loved the chair, which he promptly put on his head and wore proudly about the room. Cook and laundress and mother, I was—wife and friend, slave and mistress. And all day long rejecting Refined White Girls.

We hadn't repeated the advertisement, but some storehouse of old papers evidently existed in which delved terrible women day after day. They all came to see me, they all berated me. How, they inquired, could a body work for that much money? Unless, which was worse, they beamingly decided they'd like to have the job—only

the worst ones did, and I had to put them off with feeble delays.

The back gate scraped over cement and I rushed to the door to catch the puppy.

In addition to all our other possessions, we had acquired an airedale. A tremendous airedale.

Another poem about Skip had brought me ten dollars, and it seemed sacrilegious to spend the money on a slice of mortgage or food or clothes.

Tom had been won by the songs about a "one-man dog." I could see that Tom, who was accustomed to taking the rap for everybody else's temperament, rather fancied the notion of a loyal dog refusing to take food from any hand but his and turning away a hammer-shaped head from any caresses but Tom's.

Besides, we thought, it would be good for the baby.

They could grow up together.

It wasn't working out quite that way. And now, while I fled to the back gate to keep a man who announced himself as "The Water" from letting the puppy out, Skip cautiously investigated the mail on the front porch. I had a moment of frenzy finding the puppy already gone, but the water man said he hadn't been in there, ma'am, and Skip shouted from the house that he was indoors.

"Toby took out that chamber you put under his little chair," Skip screamed with appalling candor to a row of back yard neighbors. "The puppy's living under there. Come and see him, Mother, he looks so cute. And there's a letter."

The puppy looked abased for the first time in an independent career, his head protruding forlornly and unsuitably from Toby's new furniture. And the letter looked interesting. It was written in a spider-web hand on pale mauve stationery.

It had been addressed to "Employer," to the address

we had given in our advertisement. And, scanning it swiftly, I found my spirits soaring. It was a beautiful letter. Once more the phantom maiden grew in the shadows of our minds, little and wistful and loving us all so much.

"Your advertisement appealed to me," she wrote, "because I am seeking a place in a home of refinement. I am sure I could care for the little ones, I seek first to win their affections and then I guide the little minds. As to the meals, I enjoy thinking up little surprises, and, by dainty arrangements, make attractive dishes. I have studied to become a trained nurse, but found my health not able to stand the full course."

Why, this, I thought—this was someone sent by Heaven to fill our great need.

"Skip," I called, "roll under the bed and get Daddy's pen. I must answer this right away."

Bursting into a salvo of refined phrases in my reply, I extolled the elegance of our home life and tucked inconspicuously among these fine sentences the sum we had fixed on as "small salary." To my radiant relief, another letter soon arrived from Miss Flower Jones. She had accepted us, she would arrive the first of the week.

"There is one thing," she mentioned. "I must have my music. Life isn't full without our music, is it? I play rather well, I think, and you will not begrudge me an hour or so to practice?"

I found that downright touching. The poor little thing, slipping away with her violin, probably, calling into her life the throb and glow of vast other worlds. . . .

Tom's brother Jim came up from his small-town high school to attend a rushing party for Tom's fraternity. It was a stag dinner and I was happily looking forward to getting rid of the children after a bread and butter and

milk supper and settling down for a nice, leisurely snack myself over a new mystery story.

As the men got ready to go, however, Toby decided that Jim had become too dear to be spared, so he twined himself fiercely about his seventeen-year-old uncle's leg, howling. Skip offered violent aid in untangling him, Jim stood on one foot, and confusion reigned.

And then, through the clot of people in the doorway, a strange girl elbowed her way, settling a large suitcase on my foot.

"Miss—Flower—Jones," she announced herself. Fairy flutes rang.

Then, beaming at Skip and Toby and Jim, she inquired of me, pleasantly, "And are these your children?"

Jim—six feet tall, seventeen—and I was twenty-six and looked younger. *Lots* younger. (You're just a little girl yourself," motherly women said to me on the street, looking incredulously at Skip, "how can you be the mother of this great girl?") I looked coldly on Miss Flower Jones.

But I had hired her and I was stuck with her. She said if I didn't mind, she would not try to do anything tonight, she'd just sit and get acquainted. She'd tell me a little about herself.

She told it for three hours. All about herself, the eldest, and her younger sister Pink, who was a very different type. Pink was a much more determined character than Flower, but not so sensitive. Pinkie was more attractive to boys, though; they could scarcely leave her alone, she was always having dates and being invited to things.

A small gleam of woe shone in Flower's pale eyes at this recital. She was a thin, languid-looking girl, with mousy hair and a receding chin, and her clothes hung dejectedly on a lanky frame.

Flower, however—she told me, brightening—was her mother's pet and tried to stay close to her mother's heart

and tell her everything. Pink did not do this and so she caused her mother much concern. Sometimes Mother thought that Pink was not frank about things at all. So Flower had tried to do her wee best—

At this point, she did a very good best at following me to the kitchen, where I tidied up the children's supper dishes. When I asked Flower if she had eaten, she said she had not, but that I was not to worry as she had one of those stomachs.

It was a very capacious one. She filled it while she trod closely on my toes, which were already accommodating Skip and a heavy, weeping, sleepy Toby.

Into this stomach whose vagaries she was describing with relish—sometimes, she said, she would be laid up prostrate for *days*—she put all of the salad in the ice box, a cold chop, three rolls, and my piece of pie which was to be the highlight of my small, contented orgy this evening.

She had thus become her mother's baby, Flower informed me, moving in and sitting on the toilet seat while I bathed Toby. The bathroom was jammed to the doors. It contained me, Skip, Toby, Miss Flower, and Toby's chair, which he had now decided, wailing loudly, that he wished to sit on instead of having his bath. But, undismayed, Miss Flower talked fluently on.

Perhaps Flower had clung too closely to her mother. She had tried a year at college but she was just too sensitive, and then she had attempted a nurse's course but had failed to finish it. Pinkie wasn't doing one thing except run around with the boys. So Flower decided to plunge right out into the world and win a place for herself.

Her presently attained place was being eyed determinedly by a leaping Skip, so I dislodged Flower and presently we proceeded in a daisy-chain effect to Skip's room, which she had recently decided, following a prece-

dent in her story books, to call the nursery. Flower inspected her future home here with some uncertainty. "I must have my rest," she told me, looking at Skip's adjacent bed with alarm.

I suggested that she get some right now, but she waved the idea away. Not *now*, she laughed. Not at night.

"You don't—sleep at night?" I inquired.

"Often I don't close an eye. It takes me hours to get to sleep, but I make up for it by resting next day. And if I have an exciting book, too, I often read well into the night."

We were in the living room, and I hastily moved my lovely new mystery under another book. And added, feeling cruel, that she couldn't have the light on in the bedroom after Skip was in bed.

Then, Flower decided, we would curl right up in the living room and chat.

She could see I was the sympathetic type, she said, and that I would take the place of her mother as nearly as anyone could, although, Flower opined, no one could take the place of one's own mother. I looked indignantly into the mirror again—this great creature was certainly twenty—and against me the waves of conversation frothed and fell.

I never knew when she stopped talking.

A hilarious Tom, swooping in hours later, pried me up from sleep in a stiffened, frozen effigy. I was in no mood for the fine alcoholic flavor of gaiety that surrounded him.

"Where's Jim?" I asked coldly.

"He stayed all night at the house with one of the boys. Where's that funny-looking girl?"

"I haven't any idea," I told him bitterly. "Eating, probably. I haven't had a bite for hours and I don't want to hear about your filet mignons. And—"

Wild screams from the nursery assailed us. Screams and wails and howls. Skip—

We both rushed to the bedroom, but Tom withdrew at the sight of Flower in ruffled pajamas. A howling child pressed, damp and sobbing, against me.

“The devil is coming after me,” Skip shrieked.

Flower laughed daintily. She had told Skip that if she got up in the night, and talked, and didn’t hurry right off to dreamland, the Bad Man would catch her.

I issued a short treatise on theology, spanked Skip, kissed her, and took her to bed with me. I left Flower blushing pinkly at the emergence from the bathroom of a bare-torsoed Tom. I’d have to drape him, I reflected, trying to sleep in the small, pie-shaped wedge of bed that Skip allotted me, and I’d have to paint drawers on our little statues. And I had a maid— Drifting off, I remembered I hadn’t seen her violin.

3. *Set to Music*

THERE WERE MORE COMPLICATIONS IN SETTING UP shop as a married couple than Tom and I had ever had in mind. I had been smugly pleased at the notion of being the first bride in all my crowd, and a youthful mentality that was still finding sustenance reading C. N. and A. M. Williamson and, for deep stuff, going into Richard Harding Davis, hadn't done much probing of the years to come.

We had a flossy wedding in the living room at home. Even then we weren't properly serious. The construction of the house was such that the bridegroom and his attendant had to make their inconspicuous appearance from a side door leading into the downstairs lavatory. Tom enlivened some stiff moments of our honeymoon by telling me about their adventures crouched among the plumbing. The caterer had found the proceedings moving too slowly and at one point had opened the door and dashed in brandishing the knife with which I was to cut the cake. "I thought," Tom announced, "he'd come to forbid the bans with the bread knife."

My pretty bridesmaids paused at the turn of the stair as each one moved around it, to send me back a cheerfully improper message, and I myself was stirred to mingled tears and merriment at the sight of my father standing with such unwonted dignity, waiting to bear me off to the ceremonies.

We were thus light-heartedly launched into a closed society of married couples, with all sorts of rules and regulations. The little suburb where we bought our house was organized to the teeth. In addition to getting my wash out early on Monday, I was expected to have embroidered bridge-table covers waving in the wind on Friday in preparation for a weekly entertainment.

The song of the sweeper was heard in the land long before I ever got the sleep wiped out of my eyes. My neighbors had their empty, shining rooms cleaned before I had more than finished my third cup of coffee and completed the chapter of the book I read alongside it. The neighbors themselves had waited, thriftily, to a proper age and station before they bought their houses-like-rent, and most of them were still waiting to admit the patter of little footsteps when they got good and ready.

"I always say, don't have children at all unless you can give them everything," the lady across the street opined.

Quite obviously, Skip and Toby had no place in such a community, Tom and I were outsiders, and our maids were even less well thought of. People on the street didn't have maids, they didn't need them.

They organized instead. Every activity of life had its corresponding secretary, its dues, its regular meetings. I forbade Tom to ask our doctor friend, Bill, to dinner on the third successive Friday evening. "If you do," I told him, "we'll have to send out postcards and form a committee."

Columbus, Ohio, was football mad for all the years of the bounding Twenties. The team had grown from a heartily supported part of the University, rooted for informally in the rickety grandstand on Ohio Field, to a gigantic commercial enterprise, supported and advised by the alumni, and finally housed in its magnificent stadium, which rivalled the seven wonders of the world.

Smiling Chic Harley, our first all-American and our lasting hero, had carried us to national prominence.

So everybody organized and built the stadium. The fact that Tom and I had scrutinized our paltry budget and decided we had to give two hundred dollars to the fund was typical of the madness that reigned.

I was pleased to have Toby but I was distinctly annoyed when I found he planned to arrive on October seventh.

Miss the Purdue game to have a baby? I hooted at the idea. I carted Skip down to Mother's, with my last-spring coat hauled together with a straining safety pin around my gargantuan bulk, and made ready to cover what I could with a chrysanthemum and go to the game.

The family ganged up on me. I wept and pleaded. There would be lots of doctors around, I told them indignantly, I could be carried off on one of those stretchers they used for the team, waving bravely to the stands. Think how nice it would look in the baby's biography to state his birthplace as "Ohio Football Stadium." But I was still young enough to be made to mind my mother, so I spent an irate afternoon on her front porch, agonizing every time the faint shouts of gladness were wafted to us from the field not so far away.

Tom was spending a stretch of pure horror. I made him go to the game. And the stadium was new, the telephone boxes on each ramp were dummies only. Tom poured nickels into them at every intermission, climbed over indignantly shouting fans to get back to his seat, and took no joy in the game.

As for me, I had my first pain as we made the first touchdown.

But I made it to the game two weeks later, even though a roaring, red-faced Toby was screaming for his dinner when I returned.

Those were days of highly drummed-up enthusiasms. Preying on this jubilation were paid organizers of every sort.

Among them, Mr. and Mrs. Bassett.

Mrs. Bassett drove me well-nigh nuts. She called at all hours of the day and evening. She planned study clubs, for which one put down one's name and paid Mrs. Bassett a small fee. She arranged committees to plant trees which were purchased through a place known to Mrs. Bassett. And she finally organized the huge, booming celebration which had the parade. The women of our street marched as a vegetable garden and I was a Carrot.

Mrs. Bassett planned the costumes—for a fee.

It did no good to hide from her. Skip and Toby rushed to the door, Chris the airedale barked furiously, it was always all too plain to Mrs. Bassett that I was at home—somebody had to be. One of my dreams about having a maid, was of hearing her tell Mrs. Bassett that I was not at home.

So now I had a maid, and I woke that first morning after Flower's arrival, lying smug and cosy, sniffing hopefully for coffee.

The cold, maid-didn't-come odor, so familiar to wretched womanhood everywhere, lay all about me.

Skip poked a hopeful, tousled head in the door and explained about Flower. Flower had a headache, she told me, and thought she would lie abed awhile. She had slammed the door and told Skip to stop bothering her.

"And Toby's up, and he's hungry," Skip added. "And *my*, he's wet."

When, heavy-eyed, Flower came drifting out to where I was getting things into some sort of order, she told me that she had a lot to do.

She must unpack and then, always in a strange town, she must try to find the pastor and become close to him.

Our pastor was a cheerful, busy man and his wife a woman of a thousand useful activities. I couldn't imagine bothering them with this wan waif. But I assumed they'd know what to do about her.

Meanwhile, Flower said, she must write her Mummy.

"Flower," I said, trying to act with dignity, like somebody in a play, "I must ask you to look after the children. And straighten up around the house, too. I'm going downtown."

"Toby go—"

I fled, cravenly, from that shout; I escaped from Flower's quivering lip and Skip's look of surprised admiration. I went downtown and I shopped quite extensively at the dime store, buying an egg beater and a hair net. I peered with interest into the barber shop and wondered if I mightn't get my hair bobbed.

Combing that waist-long hair every day, I always told Tom, was what made me get so far behind doing my work. Just think of only having to slide a comb through it. . . . I scoffed at Tom's retaliation of "If you had to shave"—But bobbed hair was still a thing of daring and bravado. F. Scott Fitzgerald had written a whole story called "Bernice Bobs Her Hair." No married women had done it, Mother assured me anxiously, I'd really better not.

So now I sighed and ignored the flashing shears and bought hairpins instead. And then that parting wail of Toby's pried up into my consciousness. Flower was new with the children, she couldn't know all of Toby's little ways. If he'd pulled the top dresser drawer out again, he might be badly hurt. I'd better not stay down and ride home with Tom as I'd dared to dream of doing.

So I walked up the street and Skip came flying to meet me. She wore the unbleached muslin dress with an appliquéd Peter Rabbit that Mother had made her, and she was very dirty.

"There's a lady here," she said. "And Toby's asleep, he hit that girl and she hit him, and he cried awful, and then he went to sleep. She was going to hit me but I bit her. On the leg. And then the lady came."

I hurried into the house and saw the worst. There was Mrs. Bassett being warmly welcomed by Flower.

"This dear girl," Mrs. Bassett assured me, twinkling from behind her glasses at Flower, who was curled at her feet, "this dear girl will fit in with the young people like a miracle. Mr. Bassett has driven to the station to get Flower's instrument. I told her that we are organizing an orchestra among the young folk and she is going to join us this very night."

Outside, Mr. Bassett's puffing Ford had drawn up and Mr. Bassett was emerging with a real, a golden, an unmistakable saxophone . . . gleaming and twisted and shining.

Toby woke and yelled from his crib, and when I brought him in he clutched for the saxophone. Flower blew on it, a mighty blast, and Toby screamed in horror. In the back yard, Chris lifted an appalled howl to the skies. Skip tried to take the instrument and Flower slapped at her hand.

"It's like a miracle!" Mrs. Bassett screamed at me again above the clamor.

"It's a potluck," Flower told me proudly, when the Bassetts had gone. "I'm to take a hot dish and my instrument. For dinner. Do we have something I could get ready in a hurry, Mrs. McVicker? I mustn't be late my very first time."

"But, Flower," I tried to burrow in through all this enthusiasm, "I was counting on you for some help. There's dinner to get and the dishes—the children to put to bed."

"Mrs. Bassett is *waiting* for me," Flower wailed. "I should think I could wait *one* day!"

So Tom, coming proudly home bringing Dr. Bill, found the household in turmoil and the scraps of tuna fish left from a hastily creamed "hot dish" for Flower, standing lonesomely in the middle of the table. Bill shouted at my recital, but Tom's look at my face was anxious. This didn't, quite, seem to be getting to the root of our need for "help."

Flower came in late and woke Skip and Toby, and I had to take them both in my bed. She insisted on trying a couple of difficult bars on her saxophone then and there, and when I advanced to stop her, she wept.

"I must have my music," she wailed. "Life isn't worth while without it. I bought my saxophone by mail so I could join an all-girl band some day. Pink has always had everything, but Pink can't play the saxophone."

Nor could Flower.

But she tried. In the mornings when I was lustily sloshing tricorns. In the afternoons when I was bathing Toby. "Flower," I said, "if you could *just* help with this—," and Flower's faint, sobbing pipe came back, "But, Mrs. McVicker, I have to practice this first piece, I have to play with the orchestra Friday night."

And then, flushing a little, she added, "And, Mrs. McVicker, if I could have half of my salary. There's a fee, of course, for joining—well, it takes care of music, you see, and lights and heat and all—incidental expenses."

I gazed in fury upon her, but I weakly pried seven quarters out of Skip's bank, with Skip's wide blue eyes gazing reproachfully upon me. The worst of all of this was my intense feeling of guilt. Flower's picture of herself as an exploited child-laborer, downtrodden by an iron ruler, kept seeping through till I believed it. I had to go look at myself in the mirror now and then, where I saw a thin, pale girl with tumbled hair and black circles around her eyes, to assure myself that I was doing all of



my work and Flower's too; and after all, she had seemed willing to take the job.

By small, furious spurts, I made Flower take on household tasks. But she was not in the mood for scrubbing, she told me, she couldn't do justice to a thing when her heart wasn't in it. Didn't I agree that you couldn't do a thing right unless your heart was in it?

Tom came in that night beaming.

"Hey, Sally," he said. "We're invited to a big dinner at the Deshler Friday night. Herbert Hoover is going to be there. And a lot of other big shots. Have you got something to wear?"

The customary echo of "Toby go" failed to amuse me. In a lightning circuit, my mind had touched on clothes—yes, I had an evening dress, an old one left from college, but with a sash tied down around my hips and a big flower on the shoulder, it would do. But the children—it did not need the look of anguish in Flower's eyes to tell me the problem there. And Mother was in Florida, there wasn't any out.

"Tom," I said, "the children—"

"That's what we've got a girl for, isn't it?"

It was indeed, and that was what I told Flower. Sick at heart, though, and feeling like the vilest of Scrooges.

"I'm sorry, Flower. But it's important. The men who are in charge of my husband's organization are to be there. And he insists that I go, too. You'll have lots of free time off later, but this one evening, I just must ask you to stay with the children."

Flower listened with the face of Anne Boleyn receiving her sentence. When at last she agreed, I felt that I would always have to keep washing my hands of the stain that had formed there.

Dank and miserable, her distress hung about us, even when we were dressed on the gala night. Tom had the

usual mishaps with an unaccustomed white tie, Skip danced about us starry-eyed. "Isn't Daddy handsome?" she screamed. "He looks just like a bug."

I gazed into the mirror and washed off some rouge I had put on, which, Tom said, made me look like Camille in her last act. I did wear lipstick, feeling quite daring. My evening dress came to my knees and a large sash embraced me just above them. I rolled my hair under, in as near a semblance to a bob as I could get it, and I pulled it back stark and shining on top of my head. The front of my dress was plastered with a frieze of fraternity and sorority pins. I looked astonishing.

We had a table a long way off from the celebrities at the speaker's dais, and well before the dinner ended, I was plagued by small specters.

The speeches seemed endless. I'd read in a paper once, how a disgruntled maid, left with children she didn't want to stay with, had smothered them with a pillow. I ignored the fact that either Skip or Toby could have put up a masterly defence against such an onslaught.

"Want to go to the State and have some Chinese food?" Tom asked recklessly, when we were out on the street.

I said no, I thought I'd better get home. Tom's reproachful eyes reflected obvious thoughts—Is this the Sally who never went home from anywhere, have I married too soon and taken on all the burdens of the world? I could see him thinking all that, during the endless streetcar ride that took us to our destination. A bumping little Toonerville Trolley covered the distance between the station opposite Olentangy Park and our suburb. If you missed it, as you always did, you had to sit on a bench and watch it rattle off to the end of the line.

Tonight, I could not sit still. I paced up and down the platform and exhausted myself trying to hurry the car.

And when, at last, we reached the foot of the abrupt

rise that shot uphill to our house, we could see it and it was ablaze with lights.

"Toby's dead," I said, beginning to run. "There's a car outside. Flower's called the doctor, but it's too late. My baby—"

Tom pursued me, his boiled shirt creaking, but I out-distanced him.

Neighbors were all over their porches. It must be something awful that had happened.

And then I heard the blast of sound. I stopped running and Tom, hauling alongside, took my arm and stood beside me, listening.

We went into the house together.

An odious group of loathsome youngsters filled every crevice of the house. Pallid faces, scarlet ones, puffing and blowing, played frightful discords on every variety of instrument. Triumphant, loud, and clamorous in the center, Flower lifted the expensive shingles off our roof.

"Mrs. McVicker," Flower screamed, "isn't it wonderful? They had the musicale here. And Mrs. Bassett says we can do all our practicing here, twice a week, since I can't get away."

Mrs. Bassett, nodding in time to the music, agreed.

"Just look at your little ones," she caroled. "They're entranced."

There was Skip, fiercely suppressing yawns; there was Toby, red-eyed. Toby, whose schedule I had preserved inviolate from the hour of his tumultuous arrival on earth.

Loud and clear and lusty, accompanying all this, came the strains of a bastard refrain of *Avalon!*

Flower was weary next morning and by noon she was sobbing in her corner of the nursery. She had tossed diapers daintily at her fingertips. She shuddered away from them and wept. She had dusted the center of the living room floor and left the corners feathered.

"Her tooth hurts her," Skip told me. "It's all swelled up something awful."

So it was, I realised with a sinking heart; her face was tastefully bordered with a swelling centering in a baseball under her jaw.

"You'll have to tell me the name of your dentist," she mumbled. "I don't know anyone here and I can't bear it any more."

Our expensive dentist, inherited from a "charge it to Papa" regime! For two years, Tom and I had hidden wincings from each other to avoid the inside of that office. I had heard the old wives' tale of "a tooth lost for every child you bear" and had decided firmly on a pair of uninteresting back molars to sacrifice for Skip and Toby.

Although, since I found Toby didn't come into the world tattooed with all the interesting devices Mother's friends told me would adorn him, from my being frightened by this and that novelty, I didn't believe all those stories anyhow, and my teeth didn't hurt *very* much.

"Very well, Flower," I said. "You'll have to go to Doctor Dare. Tell him you come from us—"

That lasted four days. He wouldn't touch it, she told me, while it was so inflamed, but she must rest very quietly, no noise or moving about. So I hushed Skip and lulled Toby and did the housework in tight-lipped stillness while Flower rested.

She had a particularly fancy extraction—"three abscesses," she boasted—and now she must creep into bed with some hot milk and a couple of pills. Resigned and grim, I took her soft foods and a hot-water bottle, which I refilled at intervals.

On the fourth day, she rose, wan but determined.

"Since this is my day off," Flower mentioned.

The ensuing days brought little practical assistance from Flower, but I did escape for short, anxious sallies to

the public library, to the hairdresser, to one movie. And Flower took over Skip's enlightenment on the facts of life with happy complacency.

"I think that anything that exists is beautiful," Flower said, kicking what I felt pretty sure was a pail of soaking diapers back under the stove. "There is no reason to hide anything from a child's little mind. No ugliness can soil it."

Well, that, in effect and not quite so fancy, was what I'd tried to tell Mother when I had to make certain confidences to Skip before Toby came. Mother had been appalled—Mother was always there with the Stork and the angels and the fairies.

Even when I pointed out that Skip's habit of taking a running jump with my stomach as her goal was causing me much inconvenience, Mother shuddered at the things I told Skip.

And, one day, she had come to me in tears.

"She was telling that other little girl that she has a baby in her stomach," Mother wailed, "Skip was. She says she's going to get it out tomorrow or next day. What will people *think?*"

Tom and I had laughed at that. But now, looking at the smug gleam in Flower's eye, I felt a squeamish lurch inside me. That Messianic look—somehow it seemed to me to bear down too hard on the first two syllables of the adjective.

A few days later I was confirmed.

Flower came to me, beaming, with a leering Skip in tow, and she burst into dainty laughter.

"She says she understands all about how the baby comes," Flower told me proudly. "Only, she says, nine months from what?"

4. *Mrs. Arnold*

WE EXISTED IN THIS FASHION FOR SIX WEEKS and then Flower decided that she must see her Mummy. We packed her off and Tom and I gazed at each other across a table for two with positive honeymoon enthusiasm. I was so inspired by not having to work at making Flower do things, that I accomplished wonders. I baked a pie, I seared a roast, I cleaned the house.

My back ached but my soul soared.

"Isn't it nice without Flower?" Skip asked me heartily.

Tom and I indulged in social philosophy.

"Is it wrong to keep asking her to do things?" I inquired anxiously. "She makes me feel such a slave driver."

Tom scoffed at this. He made his secretary work, he said, she did what she was hired to do with no fuss about it. He did his own work.

I wobbled uncertainly on this parallel. The whole handling of servants seemed to me a very ticklish problem. Mother had never bothered with them. Except for a laundress, or a by-the-day cleaner, my mother's vivid energy could never delegate any of the care of her home and family. I had memories of nursemaids when my brother and I were small, but they had been young girls from the country, usually, happy to make the transition to town. Mother had a big house and she managed it with such flying efficiency that she hadn't had time to bother

with even me as an aide. I wrote verses instead of washing dishes, I dated instead of dusting.

I had a vivid recollection of Mother and her friends dismissing domestic help with a terse, "It's far more bother trying to train them than to do the things yourself." And that other phrase, "I'm so particular about every little thing."

Well, I wasn't that—but Flower wouldn't do *anything*. She hadn't been able to finish her nurse's course or college—she was lazy.

"She just isn't willing to fill any job at all," I stated. "—I think," I added uneasily. Tom and I were always a little perturbed about the starvation wages we proffered, but, as Tom said, no one needed to take the job. Few people did.

By the second day, my zest in household affairs was waning. My front door was a beleaguered fortress. In those lush days, men selling things were laid end to end. All of them with handsome booklets, all of them offering unheard-of services. They cleaned my rug, to my distress, because I was embarrassed at the basketfuls of dreadful substances they produced from it. They shined my windows and brasses. They cried out at the horrors of the makeshifts with which we made do.

A fascinated Skip always put in an appearance and that set them off. "You owe it to the children," they told me, brandishing germ killers, educational courses, gadgets. I never knew how to get rid of them, and I spent hours interviewing them—and, usually, I spent dollars on things which slunk, later on, unused into closets.

Toby often rushed out pantless to greet them, for he had developed a passion for his chair and would seldom leave it. I had hopefully purchased him some brief, bifurcated garments which he adored. He carried them about with him and insisted on exhibiting them to all callers.

This merry turmoil completely blocked my housework and, by the time I had, with conscious falseness, expounded on the delights of the vegetable messes I prepared and then succumbed to feeding both children hot crackers and milk, the day was almost gone. And when was I going to do my writing?

Again I got a verse scribbled down—they never took long and they could be heartfelt. I impaled those Flowerless days in one of the inevitable parodies of Kipling's "If" and to my amazement it sold to a New York paper and appeared in print!

"If you can rise before the dawn is breaking
And in the furnace make a lively fire
And yank the curlers from your head, that's aching,
But still look beautiful, despite your ire.
If you can make a breakfast that's inviting
(Omitting eggs, at fourteen cents apiece)
With your appearance not at all affrighting,
Although your front is well besmeared with grease—
If you can work for hours and still not finish
And greet him with a smile despite your woe—
Teaching the children just to *dote* on spinach
(Although it really isn't good, you know)—
If you can do all this, and still adore him,
And still be glad you did it, all your life,
He is the man! And all your friends are for him,
And—which is more—you'll be the perfect wife."

Well, it was a nice trick, but I didn't do it. By Monday morning, the house was a fearful sight and I could scarcely pry up weary eyelids.

I had to pry them up, because Flower didn't come, then or the next day. And on the third morning, the cascading mailbox brought me a spidery missive. She had decided, Flower wrote, to stay with Mummy for another week or

two. After all, Flower assured me with conscious virtue, her first duty was to her mother and sister.

So I fired her. I could never have done it in person, but I was, as my high school English teachers told me, always clever with words. I produced a masterpiece of cold, dignified rejection. Which, in its turn, brought a six-page note of indignant complaint from Flower, concluding, however, with "And please be very careful about packing my instrument."

Pack it we did, in acres of tissue and expensive wrappings. As well as Flower's clothes. And that, I hoped, was the end of that, although I had a long, long visit of condolence and reproof from Mrs. Bassett.

Again I tried to cope with things myself, and perhaps I might have managed if it hadn't been for Chris, the aire-dale.

The breeder had sold us Chris as a bargain because he was "the runt" of the litter. "I don't suppose you'll want to show him," he told us. "He'll be small but he has all the good points."

Small! He grew and flourished like the weeds that grew in the next-door lot, showering their bounteous seed all over our lawn. He was colossal and from the first he shot away the moment he was loosed from captivity and vanished in a brown streak up the street.

We couldn't let him go, we had paid money for him, and besides we indignantly loved him. As to his being a one-man dog, probably, Tom said, he was, but the man must live somewhere in the Orient. Open the door and Chris was three blocks away. He was impervious to calls, whistles, pleas. I had to chase him, my long hair streaming, my bungalow apron climbing and exposing large sections of unclad me. Humiliating parades of little boys and tramps and neighbors accompanied me, and Toby, de-

served in the house, dug out matches and knives and razor blades.

Tom built a fence around Chris, enclosing the yard. It was an imposing edifice seven feet high, with shining white pickets, and Tom expressed quite a bit of his inner soul hammering away at it while Chris stayed indoors with me, where he sprang at me and raced gaily off with the pies and sandwiches and toys that I tried to carry past him.

When the fence was done, Chris ran round and round it twice and then shoved aside the one picket that Tom had nailed too loosely. Away through the alley shot Chris and after him went the family. That went on for weeks till, by a series of eliminations, we had disposed of every faulty nail.

We hadn't disposed of well-meaning callers at the back door who came through the gate and turned up smiling with a casual, "Your puppy ran right out past me."

We bought a collar for Chris with our name and address on it. To our original investment of cash, we had added a disastrous monthly payment of affection. We were a one-dog family.

He was our monster, our problem child, our idiot boy, but our own. He became extremely handsome, looking exactly like all the airedales in pictures. Although rewards that we had to pay to people who returned him exhausted the budget, we still paid them, but we cut the original grateful five dollars down to fifty cents. And still Chris grew and grew. The back yard enclosed him, but he, sailing in mistaken affection on Skip and Toby, hurled them to the earth and wrecked them.

So Tom built a small, subdivided fence around the children, shutting in them and the sandpile, boasting its own little gate. It squeaked, and Chris, always endowed with fiendish intelligence, rushed through it the moment a

child opened it. So we taught Skip to fall flat if Chris jumped on her, and to call me. As his intentions were pleasant even though unendurable, and Skip loved him, I would hear the serenely cheerful voice calling sweetly, "Mother!" at all hours of the day. I would have to leave whatever I was doing and dig Skip out from under fifty pounds of panting airedale.

This complicated my already involved life to distraction.

"If I'm *ever* to *write*!" I wailed.

. . . Because that first story had done me a wretched disservice. From being a moderately inefficient housekeeper, a gay and adequate wife, and an astonished but loving mother, I had now become an Artist. I had written a story and some verses. "Writing anything now?" people asked me. I was invited to give a talk at the woman's club. I had my picture in the paper. I was a celebrity. And besides, that hundred dollars showed alluring teeth at me whenever we banged our heads on the relentless budget of the young couple with children.

If I could sell a story—

My first story had been a merry wisp of plot about small-town people like ourselves. I now found myself ridden by themes.

This was the era of the study club, women everywhere were organizing with heavy determination, electing secretaries and planning yearly programs. These women said to me, "What is your story intended to convey, Mrs. McVicker?" and I judged I'd better get in there and convey.

So I lost the light, casual touch which had interested an editor. I thought up stories about mad people, stories about men of destiny crucified by those who did not understand them. I wrote tales of debutantes around sin-riddled night clubs and, as I had never seen either a

debutante or a night club, my stories were less than effective.

I wrote loftily of hard-riding, high-living people, in house-party sets in London or Newport. And then I wrote about the village idiot in my grandmother's home town. He had been a cheerful soul called Booby Jackson and had lived out a comfortable, sociable existence, but I impaled him on pages that gave him a Problem. And I wrote quite a lot about women who gave their all without marriage and got into quite a mess doing it.

I don't know where I thought it all up. Years later, I wrote, again in one flashing, joyous afternoon, a light little sketch about people like ourselves and sold it. In the meantime, I had learned to grind out, piece by piece, a series of children's stories, designed at first to tell to Skip. So I had a wee income with which, once more, I sought a Refined White Girl.

"Because," I said, "if I'm ever to write—and, Tom, you know if I just could, we could get a car, and everybody has a car, it's a shame you don't. I don't get any writing done, and with Chris and Skip and Toby and all, I can just about keep going. And besides, I'm losing my mind."

Nobody denied this, it was the most charitable verdict on my continual state of frenzy toward the world.

So, again, we put the advertisement in the paper.

We talked anxiously about the salary, because Tom and I have always been achingly afraid of doing injustice. But by now great holes were beginning to show up in the zooming prosperity that had been built up on a small down payment and balance like rent; people were going hungry. A home and food loomed up fairly large in the picture. And, as we always hopefully agreed, they didn't have to take it.

This time, we worded the advertisement carefully, concealing our address, stating outright the pitiful amount of

the salary. (Not that this ever stopped the many telephone calls I always received from people who called up to sneer at me. "You don't want much," they scoffed, holding me pinioned helplessly by a burning ear to their aspersions, "wanting a person to work for you for that money.")

The woman who came to interview me was a great surprise.

She was in early middle age. (Middle age, Tom and I agreed, is somebody a little older than we are who looks just ages older.) She was serene, quiet, with peaceful blue eyes under a pinned-up knot of fair hair.

She said, yes, she understood the salary was small. That didn't matter, she told me. She'd had a home of her own for some years, but she had it no longer, and she had come here to the city in hope of getting a job as saleswoman, but there were no such places open.

I agreed to that. Veterans of the First World War were going, very soon, to proffer shining red apples on every street corner. The glistening fools' gold had vanished. Tom was getting a strained look, selling his tinsel product by expensive sales campaigns that raised enough money to pay his own salary. Jobs for the untrained worker had vanished.

"It's a good bit of work," I told her anxiously. "There are the two children—and the dog. And I like my own time free for part of the day—"

"I'm a good housekeeper," she said, "and I like children. I had some of my own—once."

My fiction-ridden mind whirled through two touching deathbed scenes. I watched this steadfast woman putting a last kiss on the brows of her infants. I went on and killed Skip and Toby, said good-by to them, aged myself in a fetching sort of way with silver in my hair and a lost look in my eyes, and came back to the moment's business.

I said, in a low, husky whisper, "Oh—references—"

This always embarrassed me terribly and it usually made my applicants red-faced and furious. But this woman produced a couple of nicely worded letters about her character, written by people in a small town upstate. "You could write to them," she said. "I brought them with me to show the store people. But—if you wanted me, I thought I'd start right in."

Temptation was overpowering. And at that instant a man arrived to read the gas meter and a brown shape shot past the dining room window. I said, "There are the children—I have to run after the dog—," and fled in pursuit of Chris.

When I came in, yanking him by the large chain with which we'd replaced his leash, my knee torn and bleeding from where I'd fallen down as Chris hauled me home, I found Skip trailing pleasedly after a woman in a shining clean uniform, and Toby ensconced in a play pen, happily fitting his Tinker Toys together.

Tom came home that evening to such peace as had not filled our house on the hill for many months. Skip and Toby, in spotless rompers, met him on the porch. Chris was whisking about affectionately in the back yard. And I was freshly starched and scented and combed, and I wore the pale pink dress with the starched white collar and cuffs that I'd bought months' ago to wear while I Wrote.

And today, I'd even written—a couple of long overdue letters which I thought I might as well get out of the way.

"She's wonderful," I told Tom, seizing him by the lapels and taking him around the corner of the house to tell him all. "We are to call her 'Mrs. Arnold,' and she looks like that, she's like one of those English housekeepers that have keys hanging at their belts. She's lovely with the children, and she's tidied everything up nicely and says she'll give the house a real going-over tomorrow. And,



Tom, she won't eat with us—I told her she could, because we agreed that 'home privileges' included that, but she said she'd rather serve from the kitchen."

"Whew!" Tom said, later.

Mrs. Arnold hadn't made any confidences to Tom, in fact she'd given him an odd, sidelong look from under her brows that gave me a queer flick of feeling like a shadowed sun. But she had served us at table in an unobtrusive, skillful way that was heaven compared to our usual routine. That had consisted of me, dragging Toby by a hand clutching my skirt, poising a dish in uplifted hands till I got it slapped on the table. Then the "Eat your vegetables, dear—no, take your elbows off the table—not *now*, darling, Daddy'll do it later—" "Wait, Skip, Daddy's talking—" "Now, what was it, Tom?"

Mrs. Arnold had fed the children early and now she was talking to them—or listening to them—in the kitchen. I could hear Skip in an intense sort of monologue, and I had a moment's uneasiness, but then it wouldn't matter, would it, what Skip told a housekeeper?

"How about a movie?" Tom asked me, tentatively.

His face, always thin in those days, always tired, brightened. As for me, I stared in unbelieving ecstasy.

And nothing dreadful happened.

We went to a movie and I snuggled my hand into Tom's and said, softly, "What will they think up next?" It had been two years since we'd really enjoyed an evening. We had chocolate sodas at the drugstore, and we walked up the hill to our house under a sky spattered with stars.

I walked beside Tom, firmly restraining myself from running. There were boys and girls on the dark porches. Usually, when I walked by those teen-age youngsters, I was woefully conscious of baby-carriages and hopping children. I could imagine their pitying looks and I felt a hundred years old. Now, I thought, with a sudden spurt

of laughter, that what those kids there were trying to attain was exactly what I had—the little Lester girl with her marcelled bob and the suède belt around her hips and her boyish-form brassière—she wanted to capture the Lonsdale boy and get a house like ours, and children.

The house was dark, and inside everything was cosy. Chris raised only the agreeable rumble with which he welcomed the family. Toby was a fat, slumbering bundle in his crib in our room and a hasty glance into the nursery showed Skip's pure little face lighted by stars. A motionless body lay peacefully on the couch in the corner.

Shining milk bottles stood on the porch. The kitchen gleamed.

"I'm sure dreaming fancy these days," I told Tom.

It was a dream that went on and on. The house was clean now, even in the "behind of things," as Skip called them. Meals were prompt and hot and nicely served. Mrs. Arnold contrived ways of masking the eternal vegetables that sometimes deceived the children.

I wrote a verse about Chris and the *New York Times* sent me a check for it. It was published in fine print and fine company and Tom and I read it with wonder. People wrote me letters about their airedales—letters that consoled us very much, because we had assumed that we had purchased a changeling dog like no other ever in existence—and I felt very smug.

"Listen, Skip," I commanded. "Mother is a poet. Listen to the piece about Chris."

MY AIREDALE

My airedale is a dreadful beast
It is his great delight to feast
On creatures that are long deceased
And smelling.

He hunts in all the closets, too,
And gets him out a nice new shoe
And settles down, nor cares if you
Are yelling.

My airedale roams the countryside
And wanders o'er the landscape wide
And won't come home until he's tied
And dragged there.

He's often rushed with muddy feet
To welcome guests who are quite neat
And on their laps, he's taken seat
And wagged there.

My airedale has no soul, they say,
He's nothing but a lump of clay
Perhaps! But when we reach the day
We sunder,

When near that golden gate I get,
I'll see him wriggling up, I'll bet,
And some good soul within will let
Him under.

Mrs. Arnold was quite comfortable. Seeing her head bent smoothly over sewing, I relaxed and ceased to feel ashamed of asking another woman to do tasks that I could not manage. Mrs. Arnold loved our home. She wasn't interested much in days off, she told me; she'd as soon sew buttons on the children's clothes and fix their socks. Once I tried deftly inserting some of Tom's socks and buttons, but I found I had made a mistake. The intrusive garments turned up in a heap on my dressing table and I flushed miserably.

Probably I was overstepping in my demands—but when I sewed buttons I always sewed them to my dress and even to me, and Tom had told me that he'd lost the old family safety pin and, while he was sorry, as he'd learned

to revere it, he did think the little woman might stretch her position so far as to purchase him a substitute.

But I had time now, in my days, to exercise Chris and play with the children, and still to seat myself in hopeful reverie at my typewriter. Tom and I went to a couple of parties and were welcomed back to the world by lost old friends.

It occurred to me one morning, as I stared at the typewriter keys, that Skip didn't buzz in and out as constantly as she used to. Skip and I were rather close friends. I had, as I cheerfully told people, no particular fondness for children, in fact I thought they were terrifying savages. But *my* children, I was wont to add smugly—and, when I thought it over, they *were* different.

I had lain in bed at the hospital looking down in astonished admiration at Skip when the nurse gave me the use of her for a few moments. She opened enormous blue eyes and stared up at me with a curious, alarmed speculation, just as if she could really see me.

"Good Heavens," I thought, "we've caught this little thing out of its wilds and it doesn't know whether we are going to be decent to it or not. What a spot it must be in!"

I went on thinking that. Any other foreigner, I pondered, would be given the courtesy of some explanations of the new country. Of course we always laughed heartily at foreigners attempting to speak English and treated them with kindly merriment as sub-morons. But some effort was made to tell them what it was all about.

With babies, those alarmed, unwilling colonizers of a completely new world, nothing was done at all. They groped for words and huge individuals shouted them down. They tried to make use of objects and giants snatched the objects, often beating them by way of discouraging this exploration.

They did their small best at sociability and were laughed at.

And all that took place when they entered a comparatively civilized community, such as the family being started by Tom and me. I shivered at the outrage done small children by great adults who bounced them about, kissed them against their will, hauled them along at arm's length, yanking out their shoulder joints, and attacked them with violence when they got out of line.

I was not particularly fond of being shut up in the world of Christopher Robin and Winnie-the-Pooh, so I spent part of my time there with Skip and then took her into my own quarters at other moments. And when she came to me with anxiety and said, "Mother, I've opened my skin and my blood's coming out," exhibiting a scratch made by a pin, I realized that she wasn't at all sure that every bit of her blood wouldn't come out the hole. I gave her quite a snappy treatise on the human anatomy, and was shamed when she pondered a moment and did much better. "You mean there's a skin that's the blanket and one that's the sheet?" Skip inquired.

She loved poetry and was as happy at being lulled to sleep by me reading from Keats as I was pondering over the *Just So Stories*, which we all loved, including Chris, who finally ate the volume entire. I considered my friends who were all waiting till an auspicious time to produce children, as great imbeciles. Looking at my small wisps of humanity, I felt tremendous pride. "Just *look* what we've done," I said to Tom, "and all so simple, too."

So, now, although a great peace brooded over the corner where I had my typewriter, I began to wonder what had happened to Skip and I went to see.

I found her in her own room, sitting very quietly in her little chair. Raggedy Ann was on her lap, but Skip's face was wan and there were tears in her eyes.

"Why, baby!" I demanded. "Whatever's the matter? Did you hurt yourself?"

She dodged, seeing the temperature-taking gleam in my eye.

"No, I'm all right." And then, after a moment's silence, "Do you think Daddy's a mean man?" she asked me.

Conscience spun a wheel of my past conversations with Tom. But I'd been exceptionally good lately, since the domestic picture had smoothed out. I was all too given to pouncing on Tom with fury.

For several years after we were married, I never thought of Tom's morning disappearances as taking him into a world of business trouble, anxieties, activities. I supposed that his vanishing meant that he crouched somewhere, hidden, until five-thirty in the afternoon, at which time he reappeared in our life.

And his reappearance there was hideously likely to mean an attack, launched by me, blaming him for all the awfulness of my day. I wasn't very strong in those first years after Toby's arrival, and I wasn't very old. Tom's shoulders were broad and they bore the storms nicely. I hadn't thought about Skip listening and blaming him too.

But now, I remembered, there had been an air of pleased peace over us for some time. I proudly showed him my day's writing, when there was any, and we walked down to the corner for a soda frequently, and all in all I felt we had been very amiable. Almost stuffy.

"Certainly Daddy isn't a mean man. He's a wonderful man."

"Yes," Skip said, "that's what I thought."

She got up and hippety-hopped away, but it seemed to me that she wasn't quite sure yet. So when Tom came in that evening, I greeted him with such extravagant affection that he looked at me in deep anxiety and waited for

a blow to fall. I paraded our beautiful relationship for Skip to admire and Tom said, "Hey, are you coming down with something?"

Mrs. Arnold violated her custom that week and went out for her day off. Mashing vegetables, washing diapers—there weren't so many now, but I'd never quite reached the point the books described of abandoning them altogether—answering Skip's questions ("What," Skip asked me, "does a baby policeman eat?") I remembered a friend of my mother's who told us once that she never kept a maid.

"I can't stand her days off," she had said.

Skip had been climbing the stepladder stool and jumping off the top with a jar that shook the kitchen. Toby was cheerily ensconced in his chair, where he sat, now, by the hour, looking at picture books, playing with blocks—doing everything but the one small task for which the chair was intended. The radio was screaming and howling in the living room.

And all at once Skip clutched me around the knees and emitted a howl much louder than that.

Tears streamed down her face, and her lips shook.

"I don't want to go, Mother, I don't want to go!"

I sat down on the floor with her and hugged the shaking little body in astonishment.

"What happened, Skip? Did you hurt yourself?"

"I don't—want to go-o-o-o!" she yelled. "I'd rather you'd be my Mamma. And I like Daddy."

I had been carrying a stack of clean clothes, my thumb was wearing a teapot, and my other hand had dangled Skip's coat and hat. Now I let all of this crash around us, teapot and all. This was serious.

"Whatever are you talking about, Skip?"

"Mrs. Arnold," Skip explained. "She's going to take us with her. She has Toby's clothes all ready and she's buy-

ing us presents today. She's going to take us away where we'll be safe because Daddy will hurt us here."

My teeth were beginning to chatter.

"That's silly," I insisted. "She couldn't do that. She didn't ever know Daddy."

"No," Skip agreed, getting quieter against my shoulder, "but all men are like that. All men are beasts—is that like in 'Red Riding Hood,' Mother, do they change back and forth like the wolf and the grandmother?"

Skip's anxious eyes on Tom these last weeks!

"Certainly not, Skip. You misunderstood Mrs. Arnold."

"No, I didn't. They do that—some of them do. Oh, Mother, I've been so afraid Daddy would do it at night! Mrs. Arnold had two dear children like us and she loved them and took care of them, and their Daddy hurt them all the time. Mrs. Arnold wouldn't ever have stuck that knife into him if he hadn't hurt the children. And she isn't going to let Daddy—cut—us—up—"

It was I who had to greet Mrs. Arnold at the door when she came panting up the hill, fascinating parcels wrapped for the children, her plain, kind face pink with exertion. She saw the story in my eyes.

"Sit down, Mrs. Arnold," I told her. "We'll have to talk."

"I have a certificate, Ma'am," she rummaged in a worn black handbag. "I have it right here. I was discharged from the asylum. There wasn't ever anything the matter with me, really, except that my husband was a brute. You saw the letters from the people at home. I've taken good care of your children."

It was all true—our overcrowded state hospital had sent her back into the world, because she had been a quiet, kind, hard-working woman there, without ever a return of the madness that had welled up once long ago.

She couldn't understand me. "That's all over," she said, her lips quivering. "That's all behind me. It's people like you, then, that won't give me a chance. Even though I've paid for anything I did."

"And," I told Tom, sobbing, when he came in on me that night, "she couldn't forgive me. I told her we'd find her a room somewhere where she could stay—and, oh, Tom, that offended her so! To think that I wouldn't let her sleep in with Skip one more night."

Tom patted me wordlessly and I wailed on.

"I've arranged for her to take one of those courses," I said. "Selling, and stuff. And I called up Mr. Tennant at the University, and he'll try and help. While she's getting settled, I told her we'd pay her what we've been paying, for another month anyhow. But, oh, Tom, Tom, I felt so wicked—so cruel—"

Tom shook me, hard, knocking my hair loose.

"Stop that," he said, "there's nothing you could do about it that you haven't done. Snap out of it, Sally."

From beside us came a terrified little yelp.

"Daddy," Skip screamed, "are you turning into a wolf? Are you going to beat Mother and cut off our heads?"

Tom turned and looked down at her.

"It's a thought—," he pondered.

And suddenly came the reassuring gaiety of Skip's laughter.

"Why, it's just one of those ways you be so silly," she decided. "You're making fun."

Tom had had the answer for Skip and the shadow went away from her eyes. But Toby wailed "Arnold!" pushing me away, and there was an ache in my heart and a scar on my soul.

And as for me, I was back among the dishes and the diapers. "A movie?" I asked Tom with heavy sarcasm.

"You mean pictures that actually move? Well, I always say no good will come of all these things, if God had meant us to have a Refined White Girl, He'd have sent us one."

And, not to be daunted, He did.

5. *She Came in a Taxi*

IF IT HADN'T BEEN FOR THAT SMALL, INFURIATING writing bug which had somehow hatched inside me, I might have given up and become a housewife. I'd always had the germ, of course, but, like other dangerous parasites in their early stages, it had never become inconvenient until now.

Sprawling on the floor when I was five years old, I had known I was writing stories like the ones Mother read me out of a big book. To other people, they looked like scribbles, but I knew.

When one of those bright, screaming adults who pester children had seized me at seven and asked me what I was going to be when I grew up, I knew.

"I am going to be an authoress," I said, "and have a liter'y career."

I'd been right about that, all right, liter'y was the word for it. In high school, I drudged away over proofs for the monthly magazine. In college, I shone for a bright couple of years in a group that included Jim Thurber and Elliott Nugent, I was part of that Mencken-reading crew who wallowed in Bohemianism and wistfully (the feminine part) did our hair as nearly like Irene Castle's as we could without being so drastic as to cut it off.

But Elliott was acting on Broadway now, and writing plays, and Jim was doing newspaper work while he scribbled down funny-looking pictures that people tore up and

threw away. That doodling of Jim Thurber's was one day going to be ranked with Picasso's, but we didn't know that in Columbus, Ohio.

Writers were treated with respect but with some amusement.

"Your little story," people said. "When are we going to get to read your little story?"

"Sally's quite a writer," Mother's friends would proffer, while they looked at Mother sympathetically, thinking about my housekeeping.

As to the housekeeping, my intentions were always splendid. I scrubbed and scoured away on certain occasions dedicated to these purposes. Small bits of our house shone.

But the back gate opened and Chris ran away, Skip fell off of stepladders where she had mounted to scrub her own piece of ceiling, Toby wielded the hose through the dining room window. And I wasn't good at the housework I did, that was the cruelest feature. After my finest efforts, I could see streaming brush marks wriggling down the woodwork. Dust escaped me and ran before me, gathering in corners. The beds I made wore their coverings jauntily at one end or to one side, and my custard pies came out of the oven with the crust on top and the custard underneath.

After one day of intensive cleaning, when my back was aching till I felt I resembled the old gentlemen in current kidney-pill ads, I hobbled to the porch to wait for Tom. Skip was clean, even though without pants, which I simply could not get laundered. "You sit perfectly still and don't move," I told her, "till those things in the bathroom dry."

Toby was running over the lawn carrying the clothes pole, which was his dearest possession.

"Mother," Skip said, "I see little cloud babies tying hair-ribbons on the sun."

She's going to be a genius, I thought gloomily, rubbing the back of my neck, and we'll have to buy her some horn-rimmed spectacles and put things in the paper about her.

But Tom came up the steps, so I greeted him with a kiss, wincing as he hugged my heavily bruised frame. He tossed a shouting Toby into the air, and handed Skip a package.

And then it happened. A dull, booming crash. Inside the house. Inside—the kitchen?

"The oven!" I shrieked, and Tom roared, "The water heater!" and we both ran. Toby fell over the clothes pole, which tore down the vine at the end of the porch, and Skip pelted after us.

It wasn't the oven or the water heater. It was the can of baked beans that I had left heating, according to instructions, in the stew pan of water on top of the stove. The water had boiled away, as was its privilege, in the hours I'd been on the porch.

The empty bean can was half-way down the cellar stairs, where Chris, in indignant fury, crouched howling in a corner. There were beans everywhere. Lines of beans along the tops of all the doors. Flattened beans all over the wallpaper. Beans on the floor. Isolated, single beans in dishes and on plates, and in crevices of the stove.

Bean sauce, deep red and decorative, smeared the curtains, the linoleum, the mirror.

"You should have punched a hole in the can," Tom said, and I screamed and threw the dish mop at him. I swept indignantly into the dining room, making my exit in the fine frenzy of a Shakespearean heroine. I spoiled that by returning at once.

"There are beans in the dining room," I announced.

Suddenly Tom and I collapsed, shouting with merri-



ment, and the children, in relief, shouted too, and once more happy bedlam reigned.

But it was years before we found the last bean. When I got down my "best" dishes, to get ready for company, I unearthed mummified beans from them. The paper hangers, when we finally had the kitchen repainted, came to me and said they were obliged to take the paper all off the walls.

"There's something all over that we can't paper on top of," they said.

"Beans," I told them, and they looked at one another and shook their heads.

"You've got to run that ad again," Tom decided after the bean catastrophe. We'd paid off our obligation to Mrs. Arnold—she was working in her home town again, where people remembered her with affection—and although the budget had absently absorbed the little deduction for Service I agreed with Tom that I was not only an unsuccessful housekeeper, I wasn't even safe.

So we acquired Anne.

She was small and pretty, with nicely done hair and sparkling eyes. I thought, interviewing her, that she'd be a fine one for Tom to pinch. She looked quite too good for us, but it turned out that she really wasn't. She had a job. She was checkroom girl in the evenings at the Athletic Club. So she couldn't stay nights, except twice a week.

"But I don't ever go out those evenings," she told me. "I mend my stockings and freshen my clothes. I love housework and I don't like staying in a furnished room where I can't fuss around and fix things up. Mother always had us girls to help, and I'd rather make something out of a recipe in a magazine and fix up the house than go to a movie, I really would."

I beamed on this treasure, with a small, sullen reserve in my mind. Why in the world couldn't I be like that, I wondered.

"Would two evenings a week be enough for me to stay with the children?" Anne asked, catching Toby and tumbling his hair and, to my amazement, receiving a beaming smile from Toby for this liberty.

It would be heaven, I pronounced, seeing the stars from the opening of my cave once more.

Anne looked over the premises.

"I want to give it a real good scrubbing," she said. Everybody that looked at my house always wanted to give it a real good scrubbing. "I'll take a room at a time. And would you mind if I planned the meals? I enjoy that."

Would I mind? Day after day, I had plodded down to the grocery store, entered shyly into the hearty discussions of house affairs, and the neighbors I talked to gathered in groups looking at me with disapproval. I lifted Toby out of buckets of tomatoes, seizing him just in time as he said "Strike!" and prepared to send a fine one over home plate. I told Skip she could not keep the three kittens the grocer had just given her. I hauled both her and Toby sobbing home after this.

And during all this, I bought hamburger. Hamburger or sausage. Pictures of delicacies, deftly prepared, covered all the magazines, but once inside the grocery, I could think of just hamburger and sausage and, once in a while, something in a can.

We had a salad on Anne's first evening—a fresh, tossed salad in a wooden chopping bowl she had unearthed and scrubbed. We had squares of bright linen on the table, and my best wedding-present glasses filled with iced tea.

"Do you mind?" Anne asked. "I like to fix things pretty."

I relaxed. I took a long, refreshing bath with the heliotrope crystals Toby and Skip had given me for my birthday. I put on a short-sleeved dress and recombed my hair. Tom was amazed.

After dinner, we heard the children laughing heartily with Anne. And presently, damp and clean and sweet-smelling, they were ushered in to say good night.

On her third night with us, Anne came home in a taxicab from the Club. I turned to smile at her.

"Why, Anne," I exclaimed, "what's happened? You've been hurt?"

There was a bandage over one of her eyes and her lips were pale.

"We had an accident," Anne told me. "My cab ran into another one. I guess I'm all right."

She was up early the next morning, but she said her head ached.

At noon, she asked if I'd mind if she went to the doctor.

And at four o'clock, a little procession appeared on our hill—Anne, her lawyer, and a "man from the taxi company."

She broke the news to me the following day.

"It's my neck," Anne said. "It's twisted. And my lawyer says I mustn't work, because, you see, that would give them the idea that I wasn't hurt and really I am. My lawyer says that I have a wonderful case. He says I can probably go to Florida or California to spend the winter. And if I went to California, Mrs. McVicker, I could try to get into the movies. My boy friend back home always said I could get into the movies. And my lawyer says the cab company will be glad to settle."

The cab company was. A week later we said good-by to Anne, rosy and happy in her new clothes, a ticket to California in her hand, pictures of stars in her eyes, and

a comfortable three months ahead at the expense of the cab company.

On our table, we saw a tall lily in a vase, wilted and drooped, its neck broken. A fitting tribute to Anne.

"Wanted," the evening paper said, "refined white girl to help in small family. . . ."

6. *Poor Little Maida*

THE PROCESSION FILED PAST. WHAT TOM CALLED "TERrible tarts," bedizened and inappropriate to the couch in Skip's room. Bosomy, middle-aged women who wanted to mother me. The crash was almost complete in the world around us; the Terrible Twenties were ending in thunder and lightning and mud.

The "small salary" we offered loomed bigger in view of the collapse of taking-in-each-other's-washing prosperity. People were going hungry, and the striped silk shirt that was the workingman's badge, was being torn into rags to stop up broken windowpanes.

We tried, as maid, a beautiful little Irish girl with long eyelashes and a charming figure. She was willing and pleasant, but she made up the bed with the bedspread thriftily utilized as cover down somewhere under the blanket, and she had never done any cooking at all.

Because she was "so nice," as we all insisted, we kept Cathleen for a long time, enduring the oddly arranged dishes and the flattened-out ironing. But Cathleen came to me at last, her black-fringed eyes glowing, and told me she was going "into the Marathon."

She'd danced all her life, she said. She had taken lessons from charitably minded Junior League girls at the various Guilds, she had copied steps from the movie stars. And now she had an invitation to enter the marathon dance and she felt pretty sure she could win it.

Tom and I didn't think she would win it and we were horrified at the attempt. But this was the day of marathons, of flagpole sitters and endurance flyers. We hadn't yet had a flagpole sitter for a maid but we didn't know when we might.

We tried to talk Cathleen out of her notion but it was impossible.

"This fellow," she said, "has been in a lot of these dances. Well, it isn't hard, you just keep dancin'. And if one of you gets weak, the other one holds you up. Then they let you sleep awhile on a couch and you dance some more. Why, I've done that always, that's easy. And you wear the cutest costume, with a ribbon with your name on it—Jerry and Cathleen, ours'll say."

We had to let her go. We even went to the sawdust arena where these modern Roman-holiday makers shuffled through their hideous routine. The first day, all of the contestants were bright and joyous and their feet moved gaily. People threw them money and the boys, lean, hard-faced lads with collars fastened back, bent and scooped up the coins and put them away. They sipped cokes through straws and made jokes at the audience.

It didn't go on that way—it ended in a shambles of bleary-eyed youngsters with swollen faces. It ended quite often, we found out later, in the promoter leaving town with all of the prize money. Cathleen only lasted three days, but she'd tasted blood and she did not come back to housework.

And there was Rosa, who did the work well but in a sullen contempt for all of us that grew and grew until she left us. There was Bess, who turned out to be my cousin.

That was bad. Bess was a country girl and she tossed off the heavy work with ease, peering behind my pictures and under my shelves with shame that anyone could live so. I liked Bess and we chatted as she worked. She told

me where she came from, a small town in the eastern part of Ohio.

"My grandmother lived there," I beamed with conscious democracy. "Maybe you've heard her name?"

Bess leaned on her broom handle and stared at me.

"She's my Aunt Mag!"

Well, and so she was, and this was my second cousin once removed, and there was no going on from there. Bess could do domestic work for a stranger but not for Cousin Allie's girl. And I was not very happy myself, thinking of the tale that would circulate around about my housekeeping. Forgive me, Grandmother, you who had eight children and kept them all shining and fresh, from the time you laundered the mountain ranges of didies till you starched, fresh and crisp, the "shirtwaists" of the girls, for them to wear at work.

Grandmother's folks hadn't thought a whole lot of me, anyhow. "It does seem," they announced with indignation, "that after they spent that money on her going to school, she wouldn't just up and get married. She could teach a while, seems like."

So Bess went her way—as did Ellen, of the thick, curly hair, and long, languishing eyes and grubby, sluttish ways. As did Mina, who came from the Pennsylvania Dutch people and could not abide my casual treatment of Tom.

"What does *he* like to eat?" she asked me, and, "What does *he* say you're to have?" When I suggested having supper without waiting for a belated Tom, she was outraged, and she would never be seated at the table until he had finished.

Tom beamed upon this innovation, but it wore us all out and we were glad enough when Mina's august father summoned her back to do the work at home.

All of these girls left their imprint on our house and their marks on my soul.

And I wasn't writing, and I needed more time for Skip, who *was* a genius, and was reading everything in the house at just-past-four. And for Toby, who was genial and sweet and possessed of nothing of the devil but his ingenuity.

They needed more of me, my babies, than the tired, irritable attention I could give them when I was exhausted by half-done chores. Although they thrived serenely on being left to their own devices. It was Skip who handed me an accolade one day. She was kneeling on the floor helping Toby build a castle with blocks, and I paused as I propelled the dust mop past them, to say a word of admiration. Skip looked up at me and said the words that I enshrined in a little verse which brought me more acclaim than anything I have ever written.

Good Housekeeping printed it and letters came for me from all over the world praising its substance; and it was reprinted, and used on the radio, and sung to music.

FORBEARANCE

My little son was kneeling on the floor,
Building with blocks. I stood by to adore.
He smiled and, blue eyes loving, trusting, raised,
 "You never touch things, do you, mother?" praised.

My little son will build his house of life
With press of outer things, a home, a wife.
Please, Lord, help me to satisfy his eyes
 And keep my hands from touching, motherwise.

Then, one evening, a knock came at the door and Toby, quite stark, rushed pleasedly to open it. A woman stood there, a gaunt, frightened-looking woman in shabby clothes. She was holding tightly to the wrist of a thin little girl in a worn red coat and a droopy beret.

"I come," the woman told me, "to see if you'd give that job you got to her."

I told them to come in, and I captured Toby and draped him decently. Tom was at a meeting, and my heart sank. I didn't think I wanted this veritable Cinderella doing my housework.

"But she's just a child, isn't she?" I asked. "In school, surely?"

"Maida's in school," the woman agreed. "But she works too. She ain't never been lazy, Maida ain't, and it don't matter what He says."

Maida's eyes were fixed on me, but suddenly Toby made a flying leap at her and she caught him adroitly and they both giggled.

"Now, see," the woman explained, "she's good with children. Well, she ought to be, she's got two half-brothers of her own. And no matter what He says, she tries."

Tom was wont, these days, to bewail loudly the array of dominating, masterful males who ruled their women with rods of iron. Tom commanded me to call him "He," to treat him with respect, and to do his bidding. I was, briefly, glad after all that he wasn't here to find out about yet another one.

"He's her stepfather. Well, I couldn't help it—I was left alone, and He was always nice to me—still is, enough. But He don't like her, for a fact—minds every cent I spend on her, and sometimes He hits her and I can't stand that, it's makin' me sick all the time."

Well, I could see that it would. The girl was playing with both Skip and Toby, now, looking hungrily at one of Skip's books, and once more that persistent picture of our first Refined White Girl, straight off the pages of "Cinderella," edged its way into the room.

Besides, that "small salary" always gnawed at my conscience. If we could keep this child in school and give her

a happy home life, the small salary would buy her clothes and books and even give her quite a fair sum for luxuries on her own scale of living.

We surveyed her couch and she liked it immensely. She loved Toby and he loved her. Skip was a little inclined to patronize her, but kindly. Poor little Maida, I told Tom later, she was just dying to work for us.

We went about for the next weeks, wondering if she'd do so literally. If we'd be called before the court for having abused her and worked her to death.

Maida was willing, but, oh, so slow. Hearing her crawl out of bed in the cold, gray morning, I sighed and crawled out too. When it was only Tom who had to hunt around a dark kitchen getting a bowl of cereal, I sometimes scooped a somnolent Toby in with me, and let him hunt. Skip could find herself something to eat, too, and she could dress herself. And she could read, then, for an hour or so before I needed to get up.

But I couldn't let this weary waif make toast and coffee and cook cereal and start vegetables and pack lunches without aid from me. Besides, she made the toast and let it get hard and icy while she started from scratch with the coffee. One thing at a time was all Maida could accomplish.

A visitor from the school came to scold me about her and to look with distaste at the sleeping accommodations we furnished her.

"Tom," I said, "I can't stand it, she's breaking my heart. We'll have to fire her."

But we couldn't do that. The first time I tried it, I saw Maida's eyes get huge and wet and I heard a vast wail that was, presently, joined in by Toby and then, lustily, by Skip.

"Please don't send me away, oh, please don't. I'll get up earlier, I love it here. I'll work harder. I know I'm slow,

but I'll learn. Don't send me back there where my step-father is."

"I'm Mrs. Bill Sykes!" I moaned to Tom. "I'm Simona Legree. I bring her a present whenever I bring Skip one—I sent her a beautiful valentine without any name signed to it, so she'll think the best-looking boy in school sent it and grow up all frustrated. And I can't bear it."

Poor little Maida plodded along. We heard the sound of her small, grinding bones, we shivered when she washed the tricornes, we ached when she ploughed doggedly through stacks of dishes.

I tried to help her, but the look of alarm that went over her whenever I did, sent me away. "I know I'm slow," Maida pleaded, "but, oh, please let me do it, please let me try."

And gradually, anxiously, we organized on some sort of basis, with me surreptitiously doing all the work I could in Maida's absence, and Maida doing all of it hour after hour when she was about.

Toby loved her and that was one good thing. Although it had drawbacks. He insisted on sitting chatting with her while she did the dishes and, as this went on till the small hours and any attempt on my part to take Toby away brought cries from him and terrified apologies from her, Toby became a night owl like the rest of us.

I let her sleep late on Saturdays—I slept then, too, triumphantly. But Sundays, of which, too often, great segments were dedicated to sleep by everybody, could not be that for Maida. She had a staggering line of golden stars on a bedraggled card showing how often she had gone to Sunday School. Skip approved of this innovation. Skip, it turned out, had not enjoyed being a heathen either. She wanted to go to Sunday School with Maida.

So, starched and conventional, they set off together.

Skip brought home cards and pictures. She rebuked us

day after day for most of our concepts. She brought home instructions for our guidance.

And then she brought home scarlet fever.

There had been an epidemic raging through the schools and I'd worried plenty about Maida bringing germs home. That was one of my causes for regret about having Maida. But I suppose I'd thought the odor of sanctity was sterilizing, and, for Maida, it evidently was. Skip hadn't known its immunizing quality long enough.

She woke languid and whimpering one morning, and accepted, with a willingness which set a cold hand at my throat, my suggestion that she stay in bed.

Our doctor friend Bill had taught us a lot. We no longer sent for him when a child sneezed or bumped its head.

So, when Skip remained languid all day, and threw up briskly in the evening, I dosed her with family remedies and welcomed the final event.

"Now," I assured her, "you'll be fine."

But she wasn't fine in the morning, she was worse. And although she picked up some pep on the third day, she exhibited, with pride, a fine rosy set of spots on her chest.

"Look," Skip said, "like in the *Just So Stories*. I'm changing like the leopard, aren't I?"

I called Bill and he arrived, sending Skip into spasms of giggles by his noisy bedside manner, but sending me into an icy apprehension by his head-motioning which meant we were to go into a huddle in the hall.

"It's scarlet fever, Sally."

I said, weakly, "But it can't be. Bill, it just can't."

"You'll have to isolate her," he ordered. "Give her a room to herself. Sterilize everything she's already touched. Burn it up if you can. Sterilize her dishes every day. And I suppose you'll have to take care of the baby, but you'll have to wash in carbolic acid each time you leave the

room. Tom can go to work if he sleeps in the living room, say, and never comes near her."

A wail from Skip proved that she was listening with interest to our supposedly private interview. And I was hard put to it not to join in.

"My schoolgirl help," I moaned. "What about her?"

She, it developed, would have to wait around about a week to catch the fever. "And if she does, Sally, you'll have to take care of her. But maybe she won't. Keep her in a room by herself meanwhile. And if she doesn't get it, she can go back to school. But she can't stay here."

And that meant the end of poor little Maida and it meant, I felt pretty sure, the end of me. My family established in glorious isolation, each in a nonexistent separate room. With me as a germy, eternally sterilizing go-between. It couldn't be done.

But, as it turned out, it could be. It had to.

Maida didn't catch the fever and, at the end of a week, dissolved in tears, she left. I hadn't realized what a lot of work Maida had saved me, actually, until I was left with it all, every pot, every pan, every panty. With a brisk and indignant Skip, who was never sick after her immolation began, screaming for reinforcements all day long. With Tom, willing and anxious, but shut apart inexorably from sharing any of my labors. With Toby, healthy and frantically active, tearing through the house, madly bent on joining his sister in what appeared to him a wholly unjust position, where she had ice cream most of the time and everybody took her gifts and paid her attention.

There was only one thing Tom could do for me, he could take over at home on Sundays and let me drive Toby out in the car.

Because we had a car. At some point in the years, in spite of debts, budgets, household worries, and the chil-

dren, Tom's masculine dignity seemed to me simply to demand a car.

So we had bought one.

For the first year or two of Tom's new job, our income had increased smartly. He was making so much more money than the poor old reporters he'd started out with that we felt quite superior. But there was a flaw in that publicity racket. Selling a cause to the public involved collecting from them, and the public's great heart was not always stirred promptly on the first of the month.

Tom's nominal salary was enough, but sometimes it was two weeks late and sometimes it was later than that. The budget, meanwhile, gnawed briskly away. We established a few charge accounts, based on beaming encounters with pleasant people who scanned my father's impeccable record and extended us elastic credit.

So that before the salary arrived, we owed it all. With none left for the next weeks when we didn't have any. It was an exhausting business.

When we bought the house, my father pointed out that it didn't have any garage. We hooted. Why would we ever need a garage? Even we, optimistic though we were, knew that we could never pay like rent for a house and buy a car as well.

But, ultimately, as everybody did, we accomplished it.

A second- or third- or fourth-hand car. An enormous car. I may state here, haughtily, that this is not the chronicle of one of those first cars of all time. I am afraid I rode in some of those earliest ones, but certainly I never owned one. Ours was the day of the laid-back top, the huge, high hood, the collegiate roadster. Of horns that played little tunes. Of rumble seats big enough to hold a couple of raccoon coats at a time, and other seats big enough to

accommodate whatever went on during the prohibition-parking era. I wouldn't know about that.

So we went shopping for a car one night when we couldn't afford to go to the movies.

And when we went home again, it was ours. An Overland, with four gigantic tires, isinglass windows, a little seat for Skip.

Somehow we made the "small payment down." Through the months we staggered from paying all over again for everything inside it—a new battery, a new generator, tire after tire till we had replaced all four.

Somehow I learned to drive it. Though this was a somber business. Tom, who is handsome and generous, good, intelligent, and wise, became, when he tried to teach me to drive the car, a brutal maniac. I watched this transformation with distress. Tom, who can write as clean a piece of newspaper copy as any man living, could speak nothing but gibberish when he gave me directions.

Did he say, "Pull that thing like an 'h' toward you?" Did he ever have the simple kindness to say, "Push your foot down hard on that pedal near the door?" He did not. He yelled, "Throw out the clutch!", he bellowed, "Shift your gear now!", he said, "Cut 'er!" and "Shove 'er in high!"

The only way I can ever tell left from right is by two devices—an early one, that I have tried to discard, which is to imagine myself playing *Hiawatha* on my grandmother's organ, and the hand that plays only two notes is my left one. That is awkward, and when I was married I abandoned it in favor of looking to see which hand my wedding ring was on. But I was thin after Toby came and sometimes I didn't have my wedding ring on.

Trying to transport yourself back to a parlor organ played when you were five years old is a difficult thing to do when, at the same time, you are frantically wrestling



with a two-thousand-pound, rampaging monster which wants to climb a hill.

Nevertheless, I learned to drive. I did it by driving the car down to a homecoming football game one Saturday, when Tom couldn't get back home to drive us. I had never been out in the car alone before, and Tom attributes prematurely white hair to my choice of that particular afternoon to do it; but I drove through all of that insane traffic safely and, from then on, I drove perpetually.

7. Anita

TOM COULD MANAGE THE HOUSE AND SKIP, HE ASSURED me, for a whole Sunday afternoon. We had provided Skip with a large, clanging cowbell that someone had unearthed. Tom could sit in sterile safety in the living room and listen for this summons. Skip had instructions to ring the bell for nothing less than a major catastrophe. I was wise enough to wait until she had rung it a great many times before I left her. I didn't suppose Skip would set the house on fire in order to get to ring the bell, but you couldn't be sure.

Leaving Tom wrestling with an enragedly envious Toby, who would accept no toy but a cowbell, I took a violently antiseptic bath. Then I washed my long-suffering hair, scraped myself to the bone with carbolic acid applications, snatched up Toby, and took the car out to drive.

We headed for the country. Toby couldn't understand why he wasn't to visit people. My conscience wouldn't let us get out of the car once we were en route. Flying through the air, I felt that we were moderately safe from scattering infection. I didn't dare risk Toby's sociability wherever there were people, so I took to back roads and very shortly met with trouble. We stuck fast in four feet of mud, on a little back road where no other cars came.

I hailed a couple of farmers in a field, at last, and they came cheerily enough and dug us out.

When they had set us back on the road toward town,

I found myself very shaky, so I pulled over to the side under a tree and stopped. I was worried about those farmers. Of course, I told myself, scarlet fever germs didn't ride along tucked neatly under cover, just to leap out and attack people when they came near us. I was certainly antiseptic myself, and Toby didn't have. . . .

Toby interrupted this reassurance by coughing—a loud, ugly, rasping cough.

I didn't burst into tears. I said, "Whee, that was a bad cough!", laughed falsely, and handed him my handkerchief. And then, as he mopped his forehead the way the farmers had mopped theirs, I saw something.

Little speckles all over Toby's forehead. Little, pointed red specks on a white background.

A rash. Toby had it. And we were scattering it all over the country. I was worse than a Typhoid Mary, I had a whole family at work distributing germs. And if I weren't arrested, I ought to be.

We burned up the tires getting home, and the sight of Tom, placid and untroubled, reading the Sunday papers from a distance to Skip, in a vast roar, plunged me even deeper into outraged woe. "Biff, bam, powiel!" shouted Tom, and, "He has it!" I wailed; and Skip rang the cowbell in angry annoyance at having the narrative stopped.

Toby tried to climb on Tom and the papers, and I snatched him away, hungry, mad, and damp. He couldn't touch Tom now—and I simply couldn't think of any place to put him. "What did you say, Daddy?" screamed Skip, and "I said *powie*," bellowed Tom. "What is it, Sally? Shall I take Toby?"

I said, "Call the doctor," sat down on the floor clutching Toby, and wailed into his hair; and Skip rang the cowbell steadily while Tom tried to reach Bill through all this bedlam.

Skip had to be fed. I prepared some small messes,

served them on marked dishes and washed her. "At least," I said, "after today I can wash up both children at once—literally."

That's what I thought.

The doctor came.

Toby was very pleased that he was permitted a share of Doctor Bill's attentions. He agreed to let the little telephone work on his chest, and he emitted only minor roars of displeasure at having to swallow a flat stick. I watched Bill's eyes with anxiety, and when he turned to face me, I sighed.

"Okay, I see he has it," I said.

"No," Bill told me. "You won't believe this, Sally—but he doesn't have it."

He waved a mournful stethoscope to quell my premature rejoicings.

"Wait. It's worse. He's got measles."

And so he did—contrary to all the laws of probability. We hadn't a notion in the world where Toby *could* have got measles. (We found out later—another of those merry gatherings, a pre-kindergarten affair to which all the children on the street had been asked. Maida had proudly taken Toby, because Skip was downtown with me buying shoes. And Toby had been particularly won by the attentions of a sniffing, red-nosed, watery-eyed neighbor child.)

"I don't need to tell you, Sally, that it's awfully important that he shouldn't catch scarlet fever with it. And Skip hasn't had measles, either, so you mustn't let her run the slightest risk of picking up a germ. Better move him—let's see, where could you put him?"

Where, indeed?

It finally worked out with a crib in the dining room for Toby, Tom on the living room couch, and me in Skip's old room on Maida's propped-up sofa—the theory being that

Tom could listen for Toby and I could watch over Skip. But Skip was serenely convalescent, whereas measles is a sticky, hurting, feverish wretchedness, and I could not leave my fretting, itching baby to wail through the night. So I had to glance in at Skip, scour off the results of this surveillance, and then go out and fuss with Toby, easing his pillow, cooling his hot little face, patting him. This went on most of the night. In the daytime, he had to be moved to the living room—Tom had had measles and was, Bill assured us, in small danger of getting them again. All the living room windows must be darkened then, as there was danger to Toby's eyes from any sunlight.

I took away Skip's cowbell and gave it to Toby, and all day long it clanged, loud and sonorous.

Toby was miserable for only three days in a puny, still fashion that brought visions of small, white tombstones into my head. After that, he was frankly cross and uproarious, sliding between my legs, scooting along the floor, firmly bent on getting in to see Skip. I had to wrestle with him steadily, in constant terror that by doing so I was slipping him one overlooked germ.

We bought them colored graniteware dishes, and I lived in fear that I would, from sheer exhaustion, one day serve Skip lunch and measles germs on the red ones while Toby dined off scarlet fever and oatmeal neatly mingled in the blue.

I should certainly have been a joy to one of those nasally sensitive, if socially unkind, gentlemen in the ads. I was so oppressively fragrant of the odor of carbolic acid that I should have been quite a charmer.

But I was successful. The house was buried in miscellany, the beds had to settle for an airing instead of ever being properly made, we had a hundred and twenty milk bottles in the basement—the milkman was allowed to leave milk daily but not permitted to take anything away

from the house—among which Chris roved with a musical crash at intervals. Food was primitive and simple, or completely delicatessen. But Skip did not catch measles. And Toby did not have scarlet fever.

The long, long month dragged by. I scanned the newspapers now and then, expecting to find some reference to the astronomical phenomenon which had caused time to stand still forever, beginning with that first of the thirty days' quarantine.

And then the visiting nurse came up to inspect Skip, who had been enlivening her last week by stripping long bits of her outer covering off in a revolting manner.

Skip was fine, she assured me, and wasn't this a fine little boy. He agreed, and proffered her a share of his doughnut, which I could see she thought most unsuitable diet for so small a creature. And then she scanned me thoughtfully.

"You know," she said, "*you're* the one who looks like needing a nurse. Are you—do you—I wonder—"

I received this sympathy with enthusiasm. I had felt sure for a long time that no one half appreciated the marvels I had wrought.

"I am rather tired," I told her with lofty languor. "I've had all of the care of the children, you see. Perhaps I'm a little run down."

"Yes," she said, but without conviction. "Yes, but—it's around your eyes— I'm practically never mistaken. Don't you think—"

After she had gone, I reviewed her visit. Goodness, I thought, she acted as if I had something contagious. But she wouldn't have gone off, leaving me about to be loosed, if I were full of germs. Besides, I hadn't had any cough or spots. Just this dizziness, and a tendency to recoil somewhat violently from the daily boiled ham and store cake.

Suddenly an amusing notion caught up with me.

"Heavens—I wonder if she thought I might be going to have a baby?"

There's that verse about the happy moron, and its last line—"My God, perhaps I am."

It was quite a while before my inner thoughts found that an admirable vehicle for expression.

Because, into this world of measles, scarlet fever, dust, accumulated household horrors, costly doctor bills, diets, depression both personal and cosmic, I had chosen this particular time to become what my mother's friends delicately described as "that way" for Betsy.

"On top of all this other stuff," I told Tom, "we're going to have a *baby*."

"Now," Tom gasped, after his first astounded reaction, "now, you've just *got* to have some Help."

So we put an ad in the paper and we got Anita. And for that, I repeatedly told Tom, we could certainly count on complete afterlife bliss. No celestial judge would ever argue that we hadn't had our penance on earth.

Although you can't be sure. They must have liked her up there, they made two of her. For Anita was half of a pair of twins, and, as we were to find out, that's exactly what she was. Half awake, half alive, half-witted. Life has never, since that time, become quite so unbearable that I can't ameliorate my sufferings by thinking, "At least, now I don't have Anita."

She was rather a pretty girl at first sight. Very much the mode of that silly period—fat wads of waved but unwashed dark hair, big, round eyes that proved later to be astigmatically useless, full, adenoidal, half-open mouth. She brought Sarita with her—they were twins, and they'd always done everything together, they told me, looking reproachful at my plan for separating them now. But they were quitting school and they'd like to work, so Anita would be glad to take the job. Yes, she was a good cook;

yes, she could do the darning; yes, she loved children and would be glad to take care of the little boy.

They wept on each other when they parted. "But I'll telephone you," Sarita said. "I'll telephone you every day."

She did! Anita shuffled down to get breakfast in what she apparently considered a working costume. This consisted of a soiled dress with a bedraggled slip dangling below it, enormous bedroom slippers, and a permanently dazed expression. She would listen, blinking, to my summary of instructions for the day—"Yes. Yes—oh!—uh-huh—," as I cruised on, in what I considered a snappily efficient manner. And then, when I had left her, she would come slapping after me, saying, "I didn' unnerstand what you wanted got for breakfast."

And then, always, the telephone rang. With an air of leaving nonessentials behind, Anita flew like a homing bird to answer it. Our telephone lived in the square hall that separated the dining room from the bedroom quarters, and so, after that first morning, did Anita. She sat on the floor, her back against the dining room door, her legs sprawled completely across the hallway. So that you couldn't come out of any room without falling over her.

As to why I didn't tell her to get up and stop telephoning and do the work—I simply don't know. I was utterly terrified, through all of those years, of issuing a direct order. It seemed to me then, as, I am afraid, it seems to me now, unfair that one adult should give orders to another. Tom can scoff at this (and does), he can assure me that all business will bog down and go to ruin if this effete attitude of mine spreads. I could hint, I could suggest, and I could write notes. Those notes to the maids! I was always at home with a typewriter and I could be extraordinarily brisk and competent in my little letters.

I posted them about, sticking them on the pots and

pans, propping them on the ironing, tucking them under doors.

But Anita couldn't read. After a time, I began to think this was literally true. She was a product of the hurried, slipshod public schools that assumed that everybody beyond a certain age has learned to read long words. Anita, hampered, I felt sure, by almost useless eyes, couldn't read four words in a row. So my letters were ignored.

I crept fearfully about, trying not to see the unironed clothes stacked, damp and mildewing, in the kitchen. I would hear the telephone receiver click down and sigh with relief and then, to my woe, I would hear Anita giving another number to the operator. She and Sarita worked separately gathering news—each of them telephoned a long list of other people, collected the budgets of each, and then exchanged these hoards.

They were perpetually astonished. "Oh, *Kid!* She didn't! Did she, honest, say that? Well, Kid, what do you think he'll do? He *won't!* Honest? Kid, do you think so?"

We were paying Anita a little more salary than we'd paid previously. "There's a lot to be done," Tom worried, "and you aren't doing so well, Sally, you can't handle this yourself. We'll manage."

Poor Tom was juggling Indian clubs himself, these dangerous days, with the publicity racket toppling along with the prosperity that had given birth to it. So I felt I must be efficient in directing the use of this "help" item in our budget. I was wretchedly ill. The books my mother gave me all said that "nausea and morning sickness do not occur with second or third births." I obediently tried to follow the books' instructions, but the house continued to rock around me when I got up in the morning, and the greasy fried foods that Anita did produce, when urged, continued to send me flying away from the table in ignominious retreat.

Bill gave me some pills which were supposed to stop this. I told him ironically that I assumed they did it by bringing on the nausea without my having to wait for dinner. I finally settled for not eating at all, and poor Tom had to sit at the table seeing me grim and unamused across from him, staring unbelievably at the evidence of his enormous appetite. Anita had come from a household which bore with no nonsense about serving—masses of charred meat and greasy potatoes lay heavily about the board and plates were shoved back to make way for slabs of pie.

I took this up with the maid. I explained that we liked a salad with dinner, always, that I liked the table completely cleared before dessert was served, that coffee was to come with dessert. Anita listened, an anxious eye cocked toward the telephone hall, murmuring steady assent, "Yes—yes—uh-huh— I see—" And then, when she could spare the time from Sarita's latest mass of amazing information, she would trudge after me again. "I didn' unnerstand what you wanted done with this lettuce. I didn't get what you said about this coffee."

Since our interviews always terminated either by her having to answer the phone or my having to go throw up, we got nowhere at all. I gave up, wearily, and let her slap the unappetizing messes about as she chose.

She cleaned house briskly every morning, her slippers flapping in quite a scurry of activity. Superficially, this seemed effective. It wasn't till I opened a table drawer and was confronted by everything that had ever stood on top of anything else, stuffed and packed away here, that I saw the system. Anita moved everything inside something else. The public library telephoned me and I found the explanation of a sudden complete disappearance of all incoming mail.

"Yes," Anita said, standing on one foot, her eyes filling,

"I put the mail away inside one of them there books. It looked messy on the table, there."

Mail meant nothing to Anita, she never wrote or read any. So she had daily scooped this litter up and tucked it inside the books, which seemed to her to have no other function, and Tom had finally delivered a week's correspondence to the library.

And when handkerchiefs, Skip's little dresses, Toby's rompers, and Tom's underwear began to diminish in number and finally disappear, I hunted all over the house for them. When the lower buffet drawer yielded to a furious jerk, it disclosed a wet mass of foul-smelling clothes, dampened to iron and then shut out of sight and left for weeks, growing obscene fungus. The telephone had rung, Anita said, weeping, and she didn' like to leave them things layin' around. . . .

She wept perpetually. The moment she heard a note of reproof in my voice, those bulging eyes filled and tears spilled, and Toby and Skip stared at me in alarmed wretchedness, all ready to join the chorus of sobs. My own stability in those days was not great, and I did not dare risk the melee of all of us howling together. In the evenings, greeting Tom with an outpouring of the day's horrors, I meditated firing Anita, but I knew perfectly well that I never could do it. If she cried as she did when I scolded her, I certainly couldn't face the hullabaloo that would arise if I dismissed her.

Besides, I was lulled by that eternal housewife's yen to let bad enough alone—everything was being done dreadfully but a few things were being done.

My next-door neighbor came over apologetically to ask if I could speak to the maid. She cleaned the upstairs, Mrs. Brady told me, by throwing everything she swept up out the window. Sure enough, the lawn outside the window of the half-finished second floor, which we had

now sketchily furnished as a "maid's room," was a frieze of orange skins, apple cores, dust, and papers.

I scolded about that and Anita, Skip, and Toby all wept bitterly.

When we had discussed her duties, I had, somewhat cravenly, told her that she would be expected to stay with the children nights "when we go out." Other nights, I told her, she could do as she liked. I had not counted on the enormous popularity of a pair of dark-eyed, giggling, and, I feared, very amiable twins. They had clusters of suitors who drove up in clattering cars and blew the horns loudly to summon Anita.

She acquired a formula. The moment the dishes were done, she presented herself before me. "Juwanna go'nywhere t'night?" Anita asked me.

At first, I accepted this at face value. I often said, yes, I did. And then the prominent eyes would fill, her lips would quiver, she would stand on and on facing me, before, finally, I would hear her despairing outcry on the telephone.

"Mother," Skip would tell me, gazing at me as she would have looked at a Borgia, "Anita had a *formal* to go to. Mother, she's crying just terribly up in her room. She and Sarita had new dresses, Mother, formals."

After a few of these attempts, I gave up. I fought the necessary battle only when Tom and I had a tremendously important engagement, and usually, even then, I broke the news well in advance and fled from the ensuing barrage of telephone calls.

So, almost every evening, Anita slapped the dishes away half rinsed and went upstairs to attend to the real business of her day. It was the era of those strange, long, tight dresses by night, which atoned for the curious little sugar sacks we all wore for day attire. Toppling on spike heels, Anita would descend, long trails of chiffon streaming after

her, a feathered hat perched on her curls, a cloud of perfume surrounding her. Often Sarita, identically arrayed, would arrive and the pair of them would rush out to drape themselves cosily on top of a layer of shouting youths crammed into an overfilled roadster.

When we did go out in the evening, we learned one night, Anita was afraid. She "heard things." A man tried to get in the back door. Someone peeked in the window. She had, I found out from Skip, who rather enjoyed the excitement, kept the children up far into the night, crouching with her behind barricades. It wasn't until Tom and I, coming home from a party, found the front door blocked by the sofa and heard wild screams from beyond it, that we learned all this—almost too late, as I found out, to conquer a timidity that had been sowed in Toby and that lasted for a year or two.

I was worn to a frenzy with all this, the children were wild and unruly, the house was a mess. I didn't believe I could stand it, I told Tom desperately, we must have a vacation.

When Anita came to tell us that Sarita was sick and she'd have to go take care of her—"I'll come back soon's I can," she assured us—I jumped at the chance.

Even then, I was timid about getting rid of her permanently. I had engaged the excellent nurse who had taken care of me when Skip and Toby came, and I was planning to have her stay at home with me when this new baby arrived. I have too vivid an imagination ever to rest securely in a hospital. I lie awake at nights and hear the nurses rushing through the corridors and immediately I know what has happened. My baby. My new little baby, that I've been at such pains to acquire, has been taken down suddenly by some awful malady, and the whole hospital is rallying round, but vainly.

I hear the feeble little wails and I know. They are pro-

tecting me, of course, they won't let me hear about it till tomorrow. So my temperature shoots up, and the nurse calls Bill, who says wearily, "Oh, all right, Sally, you can go home in an ambulance if you insist." My dear friend and nurse, Mrs. S., will come there and look after me, and she, I know, is capable of handling even the extraordinary things that happen in no home but ours.

So I'd made that same arrangement for having Betsy, and I thought, comfortably enough, that Mrs. S. could handle even Anita, and that would save me from coming back from a vacation to go the weary round of maid hunting again.

"We'll take our vacation," I said happily—thinking of two weeks or more without Anita—"and then probably Sarita will be all right again, and you can come back. What's the matter with her?"

"Oh," Anita gasped, "didn't you know? Sarita's got pink-eye. Something awful. My eyes hurt today, too, I wouldn't be surprised if I've got it."

"Mother," Skip told me, "my eyes hurt awful and when I got up one of them wouldn't come open at all."

And my eyes, I realized, had been smarting and aching—

Tom came home to find Anita gone, Skip and me blinking and scarlet, Toby indignantly segregated from us, canned beans under way, and everybody dolorously cheerful.

"Well," Tom told me, "we've picked a nice time for it. My job blew up this morning. I get a month's pay, and that's the end."

I fell on him with a wild cry of delight. And then, remembering my unpleasant condition, I backed off. But I rejoiced loudly.

"Oh, Tom, how wonderful! A whole month's pay? Then we can have a real vacation. And when we get back, you

can go back to work on a newspaper. Oh, isn't everything gorgeous!"

Chris howled and tore at the basement door, demanding to join the merry clamor. Toby turned happy somersaults. Skip leaped about us in transports of delight.

"This," Tom announced, "is a family of maniacs."

Loud and untrammelled the telephone pealed, and just outside the door an angry Klaxon tooted, demanding Anita. But Anita was gone, Tom was fired, Skip and I had pinkeye, we were going to see the country, and, for the moment, all was merry as a wedding bell.

8. *Maid in America*

I OFTEN WISHED, IN THOSE DAYS OF INFANTS' diseases, pregnancies, and the like, that just once I would come down with something becoming. Something of the nature of the old "decline," in which I could lie with a lacy handkerchief pressed to my brow and silently, with dangerously bright eyes and a too-crimson flush against pallid cheeks, sink into oblivion.

Why all of our ailments should be so streaming, germey, and harmful to the epidermis, I couldn't understand.

The minister's wife came to call and even Mrs. Bassett, reviving from our squabble over Flower, knocked on my door again. Friends from out of town popped in. And I usually greeted them with a warning cry, mopping at streaming eyes with a hastily snatched-up piece of ragged undergarment, while they made knowing deductions about the rapid growth of my waistline.

Who but us ever had pinkeye? After the first day, we handled it cheerily enough, Skip shouting serenely, "Come in and unstick me, Mother!" I observed enough diligence about towels and wash cloths to save Toby from catching it, although poor old Toby must have wondered why he was forever being shut away behind barriers.

We postponed our vacation, however, until only a slight rosy glow remained of our troubles. Tom had a line out for a newspaper job at about a fourth less salary, but, as

he proudly boasted, "I'll *get* this." Far-off budgets always looked feasible to us, so we decided to shoot the works on the advance salary and go touring the country.

As an added incentive, we were invited to a wedding—a very elegant wedding indeed, one of my close friends in college getting off belatedly but in a blaze of glory, with all the trimmings, in a fashionable New York setting. Tom, seeing me wistful over the heavy, cream-colored envelope, said firmly, "You've got to go to that, Sally. You've been wretchedly tied down this last year. Write an acceptance."

I went to Bill, expecting him to cry out at the notion of my riding over the hills and dales in my delicate state. But Bill surprised us.

"It'll be the best thing in the world for you," he told me. "Keep you out in the air and sunshine. Couldn't be better."

"But," he added our theme song cry, "you'll have to have some help with those kids."

And that was true enough. Our children were very fond of each other. Except in a car. Put them in a car and immediately there were screams of fury, sounds of maniac blows, and a hurtling, intertwined madness launching itself around the driver's neck, a thing composed of two children tearing out each other's eyes. No amount of "Look, darling, at the funny sheep," or "Why don't you play a nice game," availed.

I had an inspiration. Maida! Poor Little Maida! She was out of school now, she was as downtrodden as ever at home, and she would consider a long trip with us as sheer heaven. I made the arrangements. Maida was to help with the children for her expenses and a little spending money.

"And," I told Tom excitedly, "we can park them in a tourist place when we go to the wedding. I won't have to face Gloria with two children dangling from my skirts

in addition to the very visible one I'll be pushing in front of me by that time."

My mother and father and my small brother were in Europe that summer. So there wasn't any place to leave Chris except in an expensive boarding kennel. We still loved him, we still could not bear the thought of parting with him, but even we could not contemplate a thousand-mile automobile trip with sixty pounds of airedale rocketing about inside with us. So we installed him in luxurious splendor and marked off for kennel fees quite a sizable chunk of the trip budget.

Tom had rows of figures down on paper, and we all peered at them with dark anxiety.

"Well," I decided, "we'll stay overnight with people we know here and there. And we'll take some off of my present for Gloria."

One thing I was determined on, Tom should buy some new shirts and ties. Tom's way of dealing with the budget in those days was to cut every expenditure of his own completely. He grew shabbier daily. When, happily, he had a birthday just before we set out and a handsome packet of new accessories came from his sister, we all beamed.

Maida was being very helpful. She came to stay for a night or two, after we'd completely vanquished the pink-eye, and she scurried around tidying up the confusion that packing for five people brewed. All of the beds and tables were covered with clean clothes in serried rows.

"Maida," I suggested, trying to stop Toby from dressing up in Skip's fanciest garment, "you burn up all that wrapping paper in the furnace."

"The tissue paper too?" Maida screamed, and I screamed back agreement, as I snatched Toby's jelly-covered fingers from a loving assault on what Skip called my "maturity" dress.

Presently Skip and Toby both began to cough and I stared at them in alarm. They couldn't be stirring up some new ailment? No, because I was coughing too—Maida's big bonfire in the furnace was responsible.

The fumes passed off after a while, the stacks of clothes were in fair order, and I had things almost ready for Tom to start loading the car.

"Only," I said to him when he arrived that evening, "I can't find your gorgeous new stuff, Tom. Your birthday presents. Where did you put them?"

He had left them on the living room table, he said. Right where we looked at them.

I called cheerily to Maida to ask her where she had put them, but she hadn't even seen them. We turned the house upside down, emptying drawers I had neatly filled, upsetting orderly stacks of garments. Nowhere finding Tom's two new shirts and ties. And then—and then—

"Maida!" I shrieked. "*Where* did you get the tissue paper you burned in the furnace?"

She got it off the living room table—the whole tumbled mass of it, complete with Tom's presents. A few charred fragments still burned sullenly among the ashes.

Maida's terrified little face clutched at my heart and I had to comfort her along with Skip, a sympathetically howling Toby, and a stormily agonized me.

"Never mind," I said. "Someplace where we stop along the road, Maida will take care of the children all day, and I'll write two extra stories and buy you a splendid New York shirt, Tommy."

This seemed eminently feasible to the children and rejoicing reigned again.

I had shakily built up a little market for my writing now that paid almost enough to clear the "small salary" that we paid our extraordinary help. I could bang out a thousand-word tale which represented a valiant youngster

bravely refraining from doing something he wanted to do because there was some reason why he shouldn't, so that it turned out that after all he wouldn't have wanted to anyhow.

And then, because these opinionated little monsters disgusted me, I fled to medieval times with them. I produced a small army of Jasons and Robins and Kevins, whose abnormal attention to duty was blurred somewhat by the clatter of armor, the neighing of prancing white horses, and the gleam of sunlight radiating from a princess' crown. Into these chronicles I even dared to put an occasional flash of humor.

Ideas for them were everywhere—the sight of Skip's red beret brought on "The Scarlet Tam o' Shanter," a wistful window-shopping tour of furniture stores suggested "The Secret of the Old Oak Chest," and I graduated into girls' stories where a flicker of chaste romance sparked now and then among my Melisandes and Jennifers and their knightly lads.

A twenty-five-dollar check in those days plugged up an enormous crack in the budget, and whenever I was free enough of the mass of household chores to escape to my typewriter, I could accomplish that.

This jolly tour, I thought, ought to give me lots of ideas. We stowed the portable typewriter among the pants, and I had visions of turning out copy from Maine to Virginia.

This is no tale of the vicissitudes of touring. The boiling engine that stalled us twenty miles outside Columbus, the leaking water pump that accounted for a day in a singularly unattractive Pennsylvania town, even the broken axle shaft which almost threatened a complete debacle, need not be taken up here.

We were happily surprised by the small amount of the bill for that accident. Maida and the children and I went to a hotel to spend the afternoon while Tom supervised

the repairs, and I dismally confided in Skip the fact that perhaps this would cost so much that we'd have to go back home.

Skip mourned over that and presently asked permission to go back and "help Daddy watch."

I furbished myself up in the women's lounge and went out to find Maida and Toby, feeling for once rather elegant. Nobody in the hotel could possibly know, I felt, that I wasn't staying here. I swept grandly into the lobby and found quite a little gathering of people there, looking and listening. I pushed my way languidly through to see the attraction and found Maida seated with Toby beside her. Maida was reading to Toby from a huge hotel menu.

"Fried potatoes!" Maida screamed. "Twenty-five cents! That's a quarter, Toby—a quarter for fried potatoes."

Toby obligingly emitted a wild cry of horror.

"Lemon pie," shouted Maida, doubling up. "Lemon pie is forty cents. Forty cents!"

Shrieks of merriment from Toby punctuated a joyous, "Read some more. Read more, Maida."

Shorn of all my splendor, I had to worm my way through and snatch the pair of them. We proceeded, with Toby shouting to the happy audience, "Fried potatoes cost a quarter. Fried potatoes, twenty-five cents."

But the car was ready and Tom was beaming. He couldn't, he said, quite figure it out, but for such a long repair, really the bill was hardly more than the cost of the part.

"He must have charged almost nothing for labor," Tom told me, as we all climbed aboard and set off again. "I asked him to repeat it, but he said it was all right."

An extremely smug look on Skip's face caught my attention.

"Skip—," I began.

She was radiant.

"I did it," she said. "I helped, just like in one of Mother's stories. I told that nice man that Daddy had lost his job and Mother is going to have another baby and this is our last chance ever to get to go to New York, and that if this accident cost us as much as we thought it was going to, we'd just have to go back home and maybe starve."

Tom said furiously, "Skip!" But Toby was shouting applause, Maida was singing, Skip was at the peak of her extremely temperamental orbit, and we were miles away from the garage.

"Oh, Tom," I gurgled, "let it go. All his life that man will feel that he's done a splendid deed. And in fact, he did—because, you'll have to admit, most of Skip's facts are true. Let's relax, this once, and stop being white-collar folks. Let's take the gifts the garage provides."

So a kindly garage proprietor was responsible for our view of Niagara Falls. "Oh, look at the cocoanut!" Toby paid tribute to the magnificent tumbling foam. For the White Mountains, where we built a snapping little fire in a government preserve and dined on baked beans—while hordes of thronging black mosquitoes dined on us, until we were compelled, feverish and smarting, to load up the children and set off in the middle of the night. For a small jaunt into Canada and return. The return was characterized by a terrible assault from Toby on one of the customs men.

Maida pried him off and bore him, howling, to me.

"He says that gasoline man took all his Daddy's stuff," she told me.

Toby saw little sense in the thoroughgoing search for dutiable materials that made the customs man take all of our baggage out of the car.

And then we found a beautiful little summer resort, with a slice of ocean and small, excellently efficient cabins

complete with cookstoves, beds, and a place to put the car.

We decided to stop touring and stay here. It was moderately within our shrinking means if, once more, we cut down on Gloria's present and stopped all restaurant eating.

I was very tired.

As Bill had foreseen, the sun and air had done wonders for me. After a scandalous episode on a long, hot road in Canada when my nausea had had results that made me calmly stop on a main-travelled road, send Maida and the children for buckets of water, and take a complete and very public bath, my ailment had disappeared and I was in splendid shape—although, perhaps, “shape” was not quite the appropriate word. I noticed a tendency now in kind old ladies to stop and look tenderly at me, and in men to give me their seats in any public gathering.

But for the most part I was rested and happy. The ocean thundered close to our odd little home, there was a gay boardwalk lined with attractions, and Maida was humble and eager.

This first night, however, I wanted to lie flat on the bed and sleep. Tom was anxious to do some mechanical things to the car, so I decided that Maida could be trusted to take the children to the boardwalk alone. We assembled some nickels and dimes and Maida proudly produced a little fortune which had been given her by an uncle before she left.

“Don't let them eat more than one thing,” I told her. “But if there are penny arcade things—little pictures and that sort of thing—they can have fun with them. Don't take them near the ocean, of course.”

With this traditional caution, I saw them off, clean and beaming—clean, I reflected, in their last outfits. I'd have

to do something about laundry tomorrow. And I went instantly and dreamlessly to sleep.

Tom came in much later.

"There's an enormous moon," ne said. "And there's music somewhere down there. Put on a bib and tucker, Sally, and we'll go strolling romantically on the beach."

The kids were fine, he told me. Skip had come back, once, and said that they wanted to stay a while longer, because Maida had found a game Toby just loved.

So we wandered along the shore, stared off across the sea, and began to feel young once more.

We went, finally, over to the boardwalk and down along the line of shoddy, gaily lighted rooms, to find the children.

As usual, I saw an enormous crowd, and a sinking feeling inside me suggested that we investigate.

Toby, scarlet-cheeked and radiant, greeted us.

"Look at the game," Toby said. "*Oh*, I like this game."

It was a very fine game indeed. "Look," Skip said, "you put a nickel in here and this little wheel pops up and makes cherries and oranges come. And look what it does for Toby."

There was a tinkling roar, a shattering, joyous clink, and into Toby's confidingly outstretched palm poured a shower of nickels.

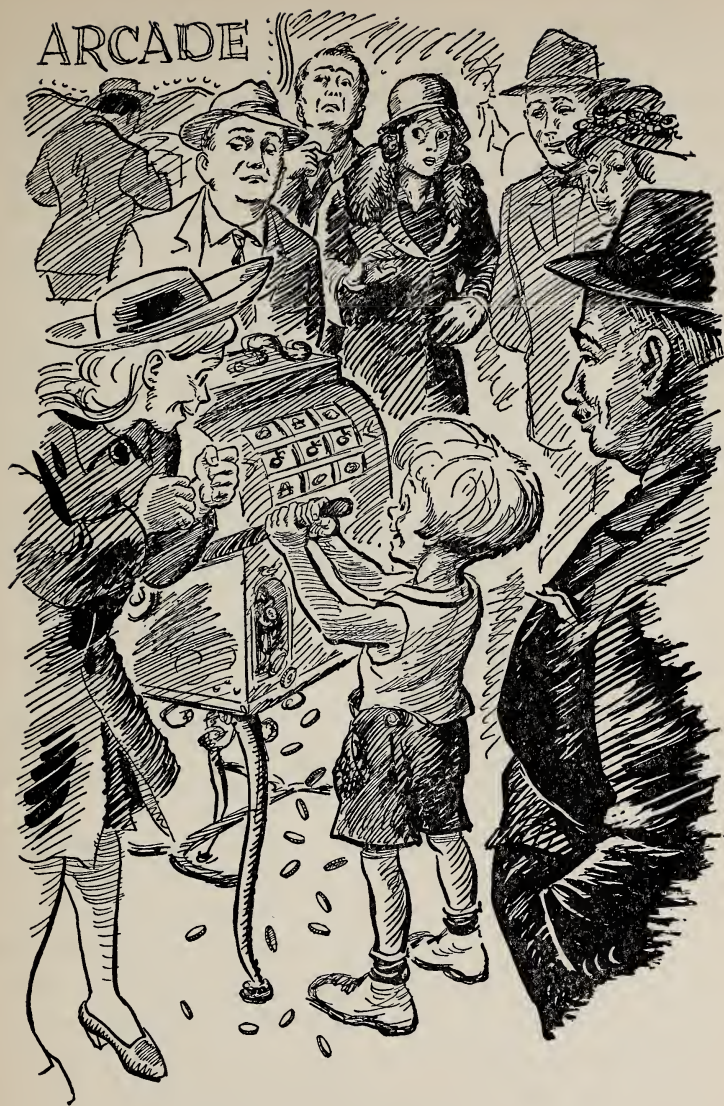
His pockets were bulging, his hands were full, and Maida, standing near by, presided in delighted approval.

Just how Toby had mastered a machine that had, undoubtedly, never chosen to give out in this fashion before, we never knew. But the slot machine was certainly Toby's that night.

"I like this game," he muttered in his sleep. And, shivering, I wondered how I'd ever convince him that life wasn't like that. . . .

We stayed at the beach for five cheerful days. Maida,

ARCADE



being very helpful, kept the children out on the sand through lunchtime one day and Toby spent the whole night standing up because not an inch of his agonized little body was free from sunburn. But he got over that, and aside from the fact that we came home from walking one day and found Maida cooking a fish Toby had brought her, all went smoothly. The fish, Maida said, was one another little boy had given Toby.

Fortunately it occurred to me to investigate. Because we found that the other little boy had discovered the fish, very dead, lying on the sand.

We were all somewhat disheveled. Our wardrobes were sketchier every day, for laundry en route was a perpetual problem. Finally I decided to send out a few things to be washed, enough to last us till we were ready to start home.

The laundress I found could not promise the clothes I needed in time for us to take them with us to Gloria's wedding, where Tom and I were to stay two days. But Maida said she'd mail them to me there and I'd have my fresh things for the wedding day.

"And we'll mail the dirty stuff home," I decided. "I can have a grand washing up after we get back. So now we're going to stop talking about soiled clothes for a while, and go hunt Gloria's present."

The allowance for Gloria's present had diminished hourly, with all of the enormous new expenses we had taken on. So I'd had a brilliant thought—we'd take the car and drive out into the back country along here and find an antique of some sort—I was almost certain I could find a hooked rug, or a quilt, or a beautiful old glass jug, for "almost nothing."

That was what I, in my complete ignorance of the antique racket, supposed. After we had driven, with the children very unhappy and impatient at being cooped up

in the car again, over side roads that led nowhere and main roads that led to the inevitable colonial cradle and shaky brass candlesticks at gigantic prices, I began to droop.

Toby was a fiend on this occasion. He adored the sea and the sand, and he was enraged at being kept away from them. He and Skip fought over and around Maida, they pleaded for food, they whined and wailed, they produced perpetual needs for intimate errands.

Just one thing interested Toby. We found, at a place where we wearily stopped for an ice cream cone all round, a little coop outside a gasoline station where a sprightly monkey was entertaining passers-by.

Toby and the monkey struck up a passionate friendship. It extended a tiny, cordial paw, and Toby crouched in front of it in an agony of merriment. He threw himself prone on the ground and refused to leave the monkey when we walked on.

Ambling along, I said to Tom, "We'd better buy Toby that monkey, that's all we need to make our family complete."

Tom was abstracted, he had seen a little shop back from the road with some attractive china in the window.

"There's the kind of platter you're looking for, Sally," he told me. "And this is a little off the beaten track. Maybe we'd find something."

We found a kind old woman who was interested in my quest. The platter was out of the question, of course, but she did, she said, have a little cream jug that was unusual and very old. "I only have the jug," she told us. "And most people want the pair. But it's a nice piece and I could let you have it cheap."

It was a beautiful piece of old luster and I knew that Gloria would like it. I was radiant when we finally con-

cluded the purchase and I went back to the car prepared for anything.

Or almost anything.

Skip was alone in the car, hanging by her knees from the door. She righted herself and beamed upon us.

"Where are Maida and Toby?"

Skip preened herself righteously.

"That's what I stayed to tell you. I thought you'd be worried if we all went. Maida took Toby back to tell the man at the gas station that you were going to buy the monkey. Toby couldn't wait. Mother, it won't be all Toby's monkey, will it, it'll be part mine?"

. . . Even now, all these years later, I don't like to think of the horrors that followed when I said it wouldn't be anybody's monkey. When I found Maida delighted with herself, having quite persuaded the gas station man to sell it to us. When I found Toby and the monkey established as blood brothers. Just once, Tom and I stared at each other with a "Could we possibly?"—but even we knew we couldn't.

It was pretty terrible.

So Tom and I got away for the wedding very much in disgrace with the red-eyed, displeased children. Maida agreed coldly to all of my parting instructions.

But we were going to New York. We were going to see the white and glowing galaxy that was Broadway in those lovely, faraway days. We would see chains of lights across the gray steel rivers, we would look at the towering buildings and wander in the green sweep of Central Park.

Tom had insisted that a little check I'd got for some children's riddles in verse go, not toward replacing his lost finery, but for theater tickets. We were going to see one Broadway play.

It was sheer magnificence, all of it.

The luxury of Gloria's elegant apartment where we had all our meals, at her insistence, although we stayed frugally in a tiny hotel far uptown. The gaiety of crowds of young people, carrying us off with them to go to the Russian Kretchma for a floor show and then to a roof for dancing.

"Never mind your tummy," Gloria insisted. "I'll lend you my sister Eve's enormous evening dress. Sure you can wear it, she's colossal—we're growing a race of giants, do you know it, Sally? You and I are obsolete—we'll have to build little igloos while the monsters that are breeding on cod-liver oil and tomato juice go striding around."

Her six-foot-high young sister beamed absently on me—no one over eighteen existed in Eve's sub-deb world. So Tom and I went frivolling among the fleshpots, held hands under the table, and forgot that such things as budgets and Refined White Girls existed.

Until the next afternoon.

We were stunned by the magnificence of Gloria's array of presents. Twenty silver cake dishes exactly alike—twelve electric waffle irons—fourteen clocks. Gloria opened each new package with squeals of rapture, although her fiancé had a somewhat hunted look.

I had tried to tuck my wee parcel inconspicuously among the heap, and I was startled and taken aback when I heard Gloria shrieking my name. The bridesmaids, the relatives, Eve and her gang, some stray, unidentified men, and Gloria's parents, were all opening gifts.

I was sitting back in a corner trying to hide my unbecoming physiological state, which was, every day, getting less manageable. Tom was across the room excitedly swapping tales of the entrails of his car with another man.

Into all this, Gloria shrieked, "*Sally!*"

"You shouldn't have," she continued. "You shouldn't. I

told you just to bring yourselves and that would be enough. Whatever *can* this big thing be you've sent me?"

Whatever could it? I tried to get up, but I was behind a small but heavy table and there wasn't any way for me to slide out from behind things these days. I looked in astonishment at the gargantuan parcel on Gloria's lap. The outside wrapping had been taken off by the maid, and this was a colossal thing like a suit box—in fact, I was pretty sure it *was* a suit box—tied with string in a heavy, criss-cross pattern. Even from where I sat I could see my own name in a heavy, blue penciled scrawl across the box. "Return to Mrs. Sally McVicker," it said, oddly.

Tom's attention was attracted by my name, and he looked at Gloria and her parcel and then at me. A wild surmise glowed in both pairs of our horrified eyes.

Tom stood up but he was too late.

Gloria got the lid off and things cascaded. She clutched them, and they dangled from her fingers.

Dirty rompers. Soiled little dresses. Small pink panties with rayon adornments on them and large holes in the seats. Larger pink panties which made me shudder in scarlet woe. A couple of enormous cheap pink cotton slips.

"Oh," Gloria said—

In the wild shouts of laughter, Tom and I joined a feeble, dismal crowd.

It was clear enough to us what had happened. Maida, displeased though she was, had been true to her obligations. She had packed up the soiled laundry and addressed it. Addressed it several times, with a cautious additional return on the inside box, and a careful address on the paper. She had also mailed my clean clothes. But she'd sent the clean clothes home and the soiled ones here, and the maid, bowed down under dozens of presents for

Gloria's wedding, had taken off the outside wrapper without paying any attention to its specific address and had sent the inner package in to Gloria.

Gloria still insists that it was the high light of her wedding.

9. Enid

BACK HOME AGAIN, WE WRESTLED WITH THE PROBLEM of the dainty one-floor-plan bungalow. I had hoped vaguely that a suitor, if not an ailment, would carry off Anita, but none did. Maida was back in school with a kindly aunt lodging her. So back came Anita, beaming, to the old routine of the telephone and the flapping slippers and every night her cry of, "Juwanna go'nywhere t'night?"

I tried to organize her for the coming event. I asked her to help me to get out the baby buggy, the bassinet, the bath table, the high chair, and even the tricornes. Fortunately, I still had a splendid supply of those. We put the bassinet in our room, established Skip across the hall, and once more surveyed the possibilities of that half-finished second story.

It might, Tom thought, be usable for both a nursery and a maid's room if—he looked wildly about—if there were any place to put the things that were already stored there. Those things! College yearbooks, stacks of magazines, furniture to be repaired some day, unseasonable garments for us and the children. In the one-floor-plan proper, there were exactly two closets and these bulged to the doors with little coats, galoshes, garment bags, shoes. So we'd light-heartedly chucked everything else away in that fortunate attic. Removing things from there now was a problem indeed.

Anita and I attacked it, however. I was forbidden to do any heavy lifting, so my part consisted of sorting things and that, sadly enough, usually resulted in my settling down nostalgically with an old copy of the college year-book or a parcel of letters. Thus Anita was permitted to escape "till you're ready for me" down to the telephone.

I looked up one day when I heard footsteps on the stairs and handed over a gigantic, dusty, and unwieldy packet.

The visitor clutched the heap to keep it from falling, and I found that I was greeting an old school friend, lovely in cool gray, with a floating veil, gloves, and a calling card in the outstretched hand that was now begrimed with my dusty donation.

Anita, ever friendly, had told her "just go right on up." So I received Eleanor in the attic, which mercifully had no mirror to show me filthy, hair stringy, soiled bungalow apron gigantic with Betsy, and bare feet with my swollen ankles made comfortable in a huge pair of Tom's old bedroom slippers.

And there was the small dinner party for a sorority group that I thought perhaps we could manage, when Anita distinguished herself by falling downstairs and breaking off one of her high heels just as I was ready for her to help serve the food. And the occasion when out-of-town friends of Tom's arrived for the inevitable football game and came to dine with us. I was feeling better than usual that weekend and I invited another couple as well. Anita was thoroughly drilled, she was comparatively tidy, and we were a gay group, who drowned out the dismal slapping of her brogans as she plodded in and out.

I was sparkling away, feeling very much the lady of the manor, as I took a bite of the dessert. It was store-bought brick ice cream, because I'd learned not to take chances on Anita's fancy cooking.

Then I glanced across the table and saw our principal guest guiltily pretending to eat. This was hard because he didn't have any ice cream. He had an empty plate in front of him, and he was sheltering it with a sleeve and making every effort to hide it.

I summoned Anita and whispered to her but Anita didn't whisper.

"That's all they was," she told me. "There isn't any more. They was only five pieces when I cut it."

Well, they were kind friends and we were uproarious enough as everybody contributed a segment of ice cream so that Jim, he assured us, came out finally with more than anybody else. But it wasn't the sort of acting as chatelaine I'd had in mind.

A frantic, troublesome period. . . . Skip was about ready for school, and that was worrying us. She'd been reading fluently since she was three. She found numbers amusing little playfellows, and adding and subtracting caused her not half the difficulty that they did me. We bought her a little globe and let her wander over it, and she took part in our ethical and philosophical discussions.

I knew very well the first grade of school was going to be no place for Skip. But I dreaded battling the great iron front of the public school system with my small prodigy guiltily concealed behind my brief skirts.

"They'll think I'm such an ass," I worried, "one of those mothers who thinks her child is smarter than anyone else's."

So I cravenly postponed attending to the chore of getting her registered for school and received each startling evidence of her ungainly mental development with chagrin. A student came out from the University and gave her a Binet test.

"Will it hurt much?" Skip asked me anxiously—familiar, poor wight, with vaccinations and inoculations.

She was, of course, just as phenomenal as we had feared. One of her answers sent me gurgling out of the room. "What is the difference between a stone and an egg?" "A stone is a piece of rock and you cannot often break it when you drop it, while an egg is hatched by a hen and will break when dropped."

In the midst of all this, an indignant Anita came propelling Toby. "Here he is," she told us, "ready for his examination."

The student accepted him, although I found him considerably less than ready. He was covered with an odd purple substance which I could not identify.

After I had laughed properly at his first answer—"What is a horse?" from Mr. Binet, and "A horsey!" serenely from Toby—I went to investigate.

He had found a delightful toy—my typewriter ribbon, clutched by the middle. He had run happily all over the room with it, playing "horsey" on his own.

Anita, she told me later, couldn't bear to see one of the children "made more of" than the other.

But all of these excursions and excitements suddenly came to a strenuous end when I concluded a racketing ride in the car by an overnight stay of some momentousness in the hospital.

I mournfully looked my last on my little brood, scanned Tom with a mixture of despair over his tremendous attractions, for which I knew dozens of women lay in wait, and amusement at what a tough time he was having. Tom always took having a baby awfully hard. And then I got down to business.

It is, I have ever averred, nice work if you can get it. I came up out of somewhat scarlet-streaked oblivion and a beaming young nurse cried out, "Oh, Mrs. McVicker, she has the darlingest little dimple in her cheek."

So there was Betsy to cram into the bungalow. As

usual, I wanted to get home. As usual, Bill found my fever-ridden worries about the children and the home front too much for his notion that a proper young mother stays in a hospital bed. So we had a jaunty ride, the nurse and the new baby and me.

I opened my eyes the night of Betsy's second day on earth and looked at the doorway of my bedroom. My hard-won bundle was heavy on my arm, my mercifully flat tummy hurt rather nastily with post-ether pains, and I had a general feeling of having been run over by a peculiarly baleful truck. Seeing Anita in the door, I raised weary eyebrows.

"Juwanna go'nywhere tonight?" Anita asked me.

. . . However, for a time, I could forget about Anita.

As I had foreseen, my excellent practical nurse, who combines being efficiently practical with being wholly human, kind, generous, and gay, saw to Anita's vagaries without much trouble. She even brought order to the chaotic house. And while I lay abed pondering, I tried to formulate a philosophy for domestic service.

The magazines frequently, then as now, published stern little pieces explaining the difficulties of the servant problem. The difficulty is, they say, that the mistress of the house never considers the maid as a human being. This arrogant, stern, severe mistress, whom I always pictured as having a tremendous bosom and a pince-nez, issues orders as though she were commanding a dumb beast. She allows the servant no time of her own. She insists on hard work being done from dawn till late night, and for all this she pays a pitifully small salary.

Well, maybe there are such creatures. To me, they fall in the same class as Tom's envied "fathers" who make the family stand around and wilt at a harsh word.

Certainly none of these things happened in our house. I asked a great deal less of the "helper" than I was obliged

to do myself. Our domestic assistants were given as respectable a place in our home as we had. They ate at our table, they sat in our living room, they used—*how* they used—our telephone. If the weather changed for the worse, they got the extra blanket out of our scanty store and Tom and I used his old overcoat.

The difficulty, it seemed to me, came from the other direction. We never urged these girls to accept the positions we offered. Indeed, Tom always told me that I represented the job as so hideous and warned them away so lustily that it was amazing that they ever battled their way through.

From the beginning, however, they had a wholly different attitude from that of a girl going into an office. These girls arrived in a state of belligerent displeasure. They were determined to put up with no nonsense.

Heaven knows they got little from me. I wasn't a great deal older than they were, I was bubbling over with concern for girls who had to work outside their own homes, I was timid and propitiating.

But they automatically took on an air of injured wrath. I tried to make them "at home" and their response was to take over the house. They considered the children either as allies against a common enemy or as wretched annoyances to be dealt with summarily. They avoided housework with every possible subterfuge. And "staying nights" was a huge bugbear before which I usually simply subsided and gave up.

That cold, dead odor of "Bridget didn't get here this morning"! It came at least once a week. Every sniffle, every headache, every temperamental ill meant that morning came and no maid arrived. They never troubled to "let you know." When they were tracked down, a weary, "Oh, I didn't feel so good. No, I don't know just when I can come," trailed into uninterested silence.

And when they found out that I paid exactly the same salary for such truncated weeks, they almost stopped ever coming at all. I never liked to "dock" a girl for staying away from work. Perhaps she *was* ill, perhaps she had a sick mother. Whatever it might be, I couldn't take that load on my conscience. And did that make my help yearn over me, ready to get out a life's savings for me in an emergency, determined never to fail me again? It did not. It typed me as easy, scared, a dope. The dull mentalities of most of these girls wrestled with a simple problem: If I get paid just the same when I don't come, why in the world should I come? It seemed logical.

Hours of domestic service are unpleasant—so is having a baby. It isn't possible to tuck into an efficient nine-to-five day all of the chores incumbent on a three-meals-a-day and nursing-baby household where children are to be put to bed and watched over. To atone for that, in our household at least, there were long stretches of time when the mother's helper had nothing to do at all. I was, personally, extremely fond of my children, and they were never shut away from me, so that hours and hours of their days were spent with me.

A brisk going-over of the house, doing the dishes, sweeping and dusting, and the thing was done. But not by Anita, by Flower, by subsequent Rosebuds and Gladas and Maurines. They spent their time plaintively dodging doing anything, and that took quite a lot of day.

I had a brief time when a girl came to us who had lost a position as stenographer, when the house marched with startling efficiency. We all bloomed and I sold three stories. But she got back into an office. It was like that. . . .

They had ironing to do but no washing. Sometimes we sent that out, usually I did it cheerfully enough myself. I never minded a good, stout, grubby job which showed

results when I had finished it. Our children went to bed almost at dusk, because I'd found that arrangement saved my own reason when I'd had them to look after in a perpetual game of twenty questions all day long. As to evenings out, the maids had them.

So I refused to take my place in the ranks of those down-treaders of domestic labor. I was young and alarmed and inefficient enough, but I was kind. I paid as much as I could afford to pay and the sum was thoroughly understood when the maid was hired.

And now that we had three children, it wouldn't be possible to advertise "nice home in small family." We were suddenly quite a large family indeed. Tom had his newspaper job, but the pay was on the scale peculiar to newspaper jobs, and there wasn't any wide margin for service. I had sold a story, a genuine grown-up story about human beings (about, in fact, a young married couple with two children, a wife named Sally) and in that direction there seemed to be gold for them thar bills.

But I was dragged down and ill, this time. Having Betsy hadn't gone too snappily. Skip was in school, triumphantly established in the fourth grade, to start, and the school, which had been just as difficult as I had anticipated about countenancing her departure from the norm, had announced that if she did start so far ahead of her class, she'd have to learn all the multiplication tables.

Every day, she and I labored and wept over those senseless catalogues of figures. Skip could add, subtract, multiply, and divide, she knew how to do that without formality; but it said in the schedules that she must know her wretched nine-times-sevens, and I had to wrestle with my own firmly rooted conviction that that made fifty-four.

Toby was a seething small machine that produced energy and directed it in wild, uncharted forms.

I couldn't manage with just Anita.

So I let her go. It was an infinitely more painful task than the words indicate. I think Anita is one of only two or three maids I have ever dismissed and before she went the whole family was wailing. Tom and I sat down that night and argued with the budget.

"You'll have to have somebody who really does help with the work," he said. "And that means a respectable salary. We'll find the money somewhere."

Well, of course, there were all those short stories I would write when I felt a little better and when I didn't have the multiplication tables to do and when I wasn't compelled to argue with the public school's taste in poetry. I had lulled Skip to sleep with Keats and Shelley and now she came proudly home to recite a whole dreadful thing called "Somebody's Mother." Tom laughed at me when I wept at Skip's severe "She's *somebody's* mother, boys, you know, although she is weary and labored and slow." "What's the difference?" Tom asked. "It won't hurt her." But I thought it would betray something lovely, and not all of Skip's prowess when she was, somewhat surprisingly, "sent down to read for the people in the voting booth," comforted me.

But when we got the splendid full-time maid, I could teach Skip in the evenings after I'd devoted the day to writing, and I'd earn lots of money.

So we ran a nice new ad and we got dozens of answers. No laundry, most of them said, and adults only, and "plain cooking." And "What would *you* be doing?" an outraged female demanded of me.

But among all of these crossly scolding applicants, there was a clear, nicely written, pleasant letter. "I would be glad to do all of your laundry and cooking for you," its writer said, and "I love children and would take good care of them. I seldom go out nights."

Of course it couldn't be true, I reflected. The pay she

mentioned, while it was large compared to our old ideas, was not in the Wall Street brackets some of them had suggested. I thought perhaps we could do it.

So I answered it and Enid came. Plain, big, gentle, an instant success with Toby, so obviously clean and tidy that my heart leaped.

I was cagey this time. I suggested a two weeks' trial. Enid agreed, looking anxious. It was late when she had arrived, but she insisted on cleaning up the kitchen and helping to settle the children for bed.

I woke next morning to the heartening smell of fresh, hot coffee. Skip was singing as she pattered off in starchy gingham and Toby was a contentedly chugging freight train. When I went to sort out the baby's clean clothes, Enid came to stand hungrily beside me.

"Couldn't I bathe her?" she asked. "Would you mind? I've got the house straight."

She had indeed. The dusting was done, the living room shone, Skip had been sent to school, and Toby, standing on the window seat, was clean and happy and telling us loudly, "Come lookat the bird. Gonna sit on the sky."

"I'd love to give the baby her bath," Enid pleaded:

That was one of the few things about the household that I loved, too.

For days, my sole greetings to Tom had been agitated, whispered recitals of the horrors of Anita. And now, although I still felt limp and puny, I found intelligence and an interest in things outside the family stirring inside me. Thoughts long buried in heaps of soiled clothes and dishes came up to meet the sun in my soul.

Enid's eyes on the baby were actually avid, so I hugged my small scrap of Heaven and surrendered her.

My sturdy American pioneer ancestresses had bequeathed me their hearty love for babies and a yen to

have a lot of them, but they had neglected to accompany this gift with the physical structure necessary.

My grandmother had presented me with a pair of miniatures of her grandparents. "Great-big-grandmother's picture," Skip said, finding "great-great" a silly duplication.

One was a genial-looking gent on the order of George Washington, with bobbed hair and a snowy stock under his chin, and the other a gravely amazed woman with a bonnet tied around her hair and eyes that followed me rebukingly, always.

"Look at her," I told Tom hysterically once. "You know what she says? She says, when I was your age, I had five children and I took care of them myself. And kept my house spotless, baked for the family and the hired men, sewed, did the preserving. . . ."

But none of this shame altered the facts. I stayed pale and listless after Betsy came, pieces of me were slow in mending, and Bill was severe about ordering me to go easy.

So I turned over even the baby to this strong, efficient, kindly Enid, and I got even with Great-big-grandmother by writing a poem about her. It said, in part,

"When grandma had a complex and her dreams took
funny shapes

She deemed it time to put up all the berries and the
grapes,

She didn't lie with forehead pale and in her boudoir
mope—

No, she got some lye and boiled it up and made some
new soft soap. And:

She made a walnut cake with seven layers,

She canned some peaches and crab apple jell,

Then she wiped her steaming brow and she said,

'Well, really, now, I don't know as I ever felt so
well.'"

Even typing, however, seemed to jerk at some dangling entrail that required more time to go back where it belonged, so, for the first time since Skip's arrival, I did, more or less, loll about like a lady.

I issued no orders to Enid, I didn't need to. She was up at dawn, literally. "I can't lie in the morning," Enid said. "I just never have." I regarded this disability with respect, the time never comes when I can't lie in the morning. Night, now, I find a splendid time for no-sleep. I can see the dawn in from its front end with splendid aplomb. But when the larks get up, Sally subsides, and it has ever been so.

Rising as she did, Enid was through the housework like a breeze.

Tom set off with his insides comforted with hot cereal and scrambled eggs, and his shirts buttoned snugly over all this with the full quota of buttons, whose sewing on Enid considered part of doing the laundry. Skip was dainty and starched, Toby was equipped with a small broom and carpet sweeper and accompanied Enid. The baby could lie decoratively in a frilled basket, jabbing idly at her mouth with a miniature thumb.

I actually found myself wishing people would come to call.

When Enid crossed my path, I conversed with her. I found that she was a country girl, brought up by rather severe grandparents after her own parents had died. She'd been grounded in hard work by one of those very ancestors whose prowess shamed me so. She said she really liked doing housework in a bigger family than this.

"There's nothing I like so well," Enid unbelievably told me, "as making a big row of pies and cakes. And I like a good big washing and ironing, it makes me feel like I've done something."

She had a hungry devotion to Betsy that touched me.

I'd kept the care of Betsy for my own perquisite, but Enid's big hands on the tiny body were so gentle and loving, that I turned over more and more to her.

This was a cosy state of affairs, I could dream out ideas for stories that I'd write when I felt better. The gentle invalidhood that I'd taken on was very luxurious.

And then, going one day to take my cooing baby from Enid's arms, I found Betsy's face wet with tears—Enid's tears.

My heart plummeted. The two weeks' "trial" was over. I hadn't even thought about it, our lives were so beatific. Now I knew that it had been too good to be true, that Enid wasn't satisfied after all.

"Are you ill?" I asked her. "Enid, what is it? Has something happened?"

She sank down on a chair, burying her face in her strong hands.

"It's the baby," she said. "It makes me ache all over. For my own baby girl."

"Why, Enid, did you have a baby?"

Her face, lifted and looking at me, was terrified.

"Oh, I didn't ever mean to tell you, I really didn't. Oh, please, Mrs. McVicker, you won't decide I'm not right for the place, will you? I just don't know what I'd do."

This, I thought, was simple enough. She must be one of those country-town Magdalens. She'd been turned away from her stern grandparents' door, I supposed, for a *Way Down East* affair. I glowed with conscious tolerance, I fairly strutted.

"Good Heavens, Enid, your past life isn't any of my affair. When did you have a baby?"

She said, quite simply, "Eight weeks ago."

Eight weeks ago! Betsy was five weeks old and I was still languid and petted, I considered myself delicate and had planned to be so for a long time to come. Scrubbing,

laundry, cooking, cleaning—this girl was doing it all with a body just as racked as mine had been, and with a heart that was empty and agonized.

“And your baby died?”

“Oh, no. She didn’t die. She’s at a boarding home over on the West Side.”

I simply could not take in the story that the girl told me.

“Used to be,” she said, “you could make pretty good money working out. Grandma and Grandpa were so strict I couldn’t ever have any fun. I had to work every minute after I got home from school and Grandpa wouldn’t let me have any fellows come to the house. Once I went to a party and a boy came home with me and Grandpa whipped me. So I got a job working away from home, doing all the work.”

It wasn’t a very good job and it wasn’t a safe place. A big, heavy, angry farmer and his three grown sons. Enid did all the work for them, the cooking and cleaning, the laundry, the scrubbing. I could picture, from her short, grim sentences, the uncomfortable farmhouse, the tired, gnarled men, the stuffy, dim parlor.

“The youngest boy wasn’t like the others. He liked to laugh, some, and he played a guitar when his father wasn’t around. Got so we’d slip away, nights, get outdoors after the others had gone to bed. We’d take walks and kind of —talk. And he’d tell me how he’s going to run off some time when he got some money together.”

There would have been a moon, silvery in a dark sky, there would have been lilacs, heavy with rich scent. And two tired, groping people, finding affection and self-expression.

“Then it got cold outside and we didn’t have any place to go to talk. I had a room up in the attic, and he could slip up—”

Heavy darkness, whispers, aching bodies too close and yearning for comfort. . . .

"But I wasn't a bad girl like Grandpa said." Enid's chin went up haughtily. "I told Orne so. So we slipped over to the preacher, in town. . . ."

Small town Magdalen! I blushed for myself.

"But I begun to show and his father saw how it was. He was awful—he was a hard, mean man. He called Orne in and he said terrible things to us. So I said to Orne not to take that from him, to tell him we were married. And, Mrs. McVicker, his father turned on us and he said, 'Married! That's an old story. Did this fellow tell you he was already married once?'"

Her head went down into her hands again with the weight of that old woe. Skip came in to lunch and looked anxiously from one to the other of us. Poor Skip, she was always burdening her small mind with potential troubles. So I gave the baby her bottle and settled her in the nursery and engaged Skip and Toby in aimless conversation, while Enid's revelations hung heavily over me. As soon as Skip had danced off again, I went to the kitchen and asked for more of the story.

"He was already married, Enid? But—bigamy, you mean?"

"Oh, no'm, it wasn't like that." Enid was swiftly washing the lunch dishes now, waving away my offers of help, hurling aside, by physical activity, the burden of her grief.

"No, Orne had run off and got married to a pretty girl there, one he went to school with. And his Pa made her do all the work for all of them. So she was going to have a baby and her folks came and got her, wouldn't let her stay. They got her a divorce, but they made Orne sign up to pay her all his wages from the farm—that wasn't much, but it was all he had. His Pa was like a wild animal, Orne

said—beat him with a stick. Poor Orne, he always liked to laugh, too.”

“And then—you were going to have a baby too?”

“Yes’m. And of course they wouldn’t do anything for me. And Grandpa said it was like he expected and I couldn’t even darken their door.” The archaic expression came quaintly from the big, anxious face. “Grandma was sorry, but she couldn’t do anything. So they made me leave, and I about went crazy.”

Gazing at her, thinking guiltily back at my own confinement with my anxious husband, my presiding mother, the careful nurses and the affectionate, concerned doctor, I felt like sliding to the polished linoleum and burying my face.

“Like I said, it was a time when you could get big wages at housework, and I managed for a month or two, but when people saw how I was, they wouldn’t keep me. I went up to Cleveland because I thought I could get work in a big town, but, you see, women didn’t want me because they thought they’d have me there when my time came.”

“But, Enid—weren’t there hospitals? Places like that?”

She sighed, the memory of that terrible, frenzied struggle dark about her.

“Not for married women. I went to one of these places and I was all fixed up—they let you work and they want you to keep the baby and all. But when they found out I was married, legal, they wouldn’t let me come.”

And that, it seemed, was true. Later I flew indignantly at Tom and raged about it and he agreed, but confirmed the facts. The wages of sin, it seemed, was social security, but society took no responsibility for the virtuous unlucky.

“I walked the streets—I clerked in a store basement for a while, but I fainted and hurt myself. And I wrote to

Orne, but there wasn't a thing he could do, these folks of his other wife, they got a lawyer to take all his money. There was nights I didn't have any place to sleep—I slept in a bus station for two or three nights till they asked me about it."

And this was an enlightened country, one of "equal opportunity," a place of compassion and justice! I shivered violently, going in imagination through dark streets with this girl, dragging her heavy body through the public ways, looking forward to pain and disaster entirely alone.

"But finally I got into a hospital, doing the work for my room. I worked up to the day Verda Anne was born. She was a lovely baby, big black eyes and curly black hair. And, Mrs. McVicker, they was just determined I should give her away to be adopted. Why, she was beautiful—the most beautiful little girl you ever saw. And she's the only thing of my very own I'd ever had. I couldn't give her away, I just couldn't."

"Of course not," I agreed indignantly.

"So I went to stay with a friend of mine—a girl I knew in the country, where I lived. She couldn't have me long, but she took us in. And I saw your ad and it seemed like something I could do."

She rinsed out the dish towels and hung them in the sun.

"That day I came, I didn't have much idea about the town. I s'posed it was all in one piece, like. This social work woman, she'd said they'd find a boarding home for the baby but I must be able to pay."

I remembered the day Enid arrived. She was late—it was dusk before she came anxiously up our steps. I had thought, I remembered now, that "they never are dependable—this one said she'd be here this morning." Smug me, passing judgment from my heights.

"I showed the woman your letter saying I could come and she got this place for the baby. So I brought her to town on the bus and started off to walk to the home. It took me an hour from the bus station, but I didn't have any carfare. Then, to walk back up here—"

"From the West Side?" I exclaimed. "Enid, it's seven or eight miles."

A body slowly recovering from the birth of a baby, wracked by hard work till the very day of the child's arrival, a soul terrified and anxious. She had panted up our steps at dusk, she had come into the lights of our big living room and had sunk into a chair, looking about her with an anxiety that I had not known how to interpret.

"Yes. But I got here. And on my first day off, I walked over to see her. And, oh, Mrs. McVicker, these people that board her, won't they want to adopt her? She's so pretty and good, I just know they'll keep her. I just know I'll never get her back."

I didn't know what to say. I made a stifled little speech, trying to express my feelings. And then I flew to bury my head on Tom and pour it all out, when he arrived looking pleased with life and his tidy home.

"We'll have to let her keep it here," I told him.

But Tom didn't think that would work, nor did Enid.

"I'd rather not," she insisted. "I wouldn't know if I'd do the work right, with her here. I might neglect the others."

"And where could we put her?" Tom sighed. "Another baby bed, another set of high chairs and buggies and all—and the dangers of infection both ways, Sally—our kids getting whooping cough and mumps and giving it to Enid's baby. Or the other way round. Besides, the child is under the care of the State now, and I doubt if they'd permit it being boarded here."

"No," Enid insisted, with the strength that had come

to her from fighting her own battles, "I'd like to leave it the way it is. If I can count on this job, if I can be sure it's steady. Only, if you and your husband would sort of help me see that they don't try to adopt her."

I promised to help on that. But my contentment was all shattered. I suggested that Enid feel free to bring the baby to the house and keep her all day on her day off, and a couple of times she did that. I saw the "perfectly beautiful baby"—a heavy-featured, silent, rather stupid infant, peering listlessly from the shelter of Enid's desperately clutching arms. Skip and Toby thought it was beautiful and bestowed badly chosen gifts on it. And Enid reported that the boarding-home woman didn't like having the baby taken away and its schedule upset.

"She says Verda Anne cries all the next day," Enid explained, and her eyes shone. "I think that's because she gets so attached to me, don't you?"

I worried constantly—I talked to Bill about Enid's heavy work and Bill, doing charity doctoring for half his busy time and all too aware of the woes of the world, said wearily, "Oh, it won't hurt her, Sally, she's a big strong girl, and having a baby is as natural to her as baking a cake. This is probably the softest job she ever had."

They all told me that, but my suave pleasure in my own gentle ailments was gone. I took back a great deal of the housework and did it badly, worrying Enid by that. I couldn't sit writing slangy, merry stories about college kids. I gagged on the words as I composed them. And the dire, ponderous treatises on social injustice that I sent out came swiftly back. Nobody wanted to read them. I didn't want to read them myself.

Tom had a week's vacation coming and he suddenly decided that we would go on a short trip together.

"We could leave the kids—all three of them," Tom assured me. "And we'll get you snapped back into perspec-

tive again. And to make you feel better, let Enid have her baby to stay with her the whole time."

I proposed this to Enid and she and Toby and Skip all went about in a perfect spasm of rapture. She cleaned the house from top to bottom. Skip mustered her best toys and Toby self-sacrificingly produced Tom's hatchet, which had long been missing and which, it appeared, Toby had been treasuring as his dearest possession.

With all of this beneficence going on, providence decided to cooperate even farther. I was invited by a small literary group in Indiana to make a speech—a horrid habit I'd picked up by being asked repeatedly to do book reviews and chats for my mother's large assembly of clubs. And it seemed that, since I was a writer—my little "Sally and Tom" story had had some circulation—the group was prepared to pay my expenses.

Our plans grew and soared. The air lines were pushing trips by air, and they had recently cut prices to where a trip on a plane cost no more than a journey by train. So I bought a few new clothes and we arrived at the thrilling day bursting with excitement.

It rained—it poured and streamed rain. And planes, in that era, did not make their daily schedules in a down-pour. We paced the floor and telephoned steadily, but the weather news continued bad. We finally knew that we must go by the old, conventional route.

"I'd bought such lovely underwear to get killed in," I mourned.

We found Toby sobbing uncontrollably. "Can't you get killed on the train, Mother?" Toby pleaded. "Can't you get killed inna unnerwear onna train?"

But somehow we got off. My speech was well received. We had a postcard from Enid, the children were fine, everything was all right. Tom and I won back some vanished youth, and I began to see things as rosy again.

And my later visions of smoldering ruins with charred bodies dotted among them proved as unfounded as they always did. The children *were* fine, clean, and cheerful. Enid had a glow all over her. Skip, drawing me aside, whispered sibilantly.

"Enid had a beau, Mother," Skip told me. "She said she knew you wouldn't mind. Well, Mother, you don't, do you? I told her you wouldn't. Anita had beaux all the time. He was an awful smart man, Mother, he played a music thing. They sat on the porch swing and he played and we all sang. It was fun."

A horrid foreboding came over me. Orne—the musical, suppressed, yearning Orne who liked to laugh? Who was still Enid's husband, and the baby's father? Well, of course it was all right that he had come. In fact, it was probably fine—maybe he'd got rid of the alimony-loving first wife, maybe he had a good job.

I waited hopefully for Enid to tell me this but she did not. For a few days she sang joyously at her work, and I asked no questions.

Then, one morning a few weeks later, I got up out of bed feeling a strange old clutch at my throat.

That no-coffee smell! Tom was gone—he'd been late, I found afterwards, and had rushed off without breakfast. But it was school time, and Skip was not dressed, Toby was running around in flapping Doctor Dentons, the baby was wailing forlornly.

I got up quickly and Skip came in, her eyes anxious.

"I heard something fall upstairs, Mother. And where's Enid?"

I raced up the stairs, Skip following. Enid was lying on the floor, her forehead cut against the corner of the bureau. She had grabbed at the scarf as she went down and pulled it off, with a shattered group of pathetic little ornaments—a gilt baby shoe, a ten-cent vase, a framed picture.

We got her face bathed and propped her up, and she protested, confusedly, apologizing, staggering to the bed and lying against the pillows.

"I felt funny when I got up," she said. "Dizzy, sort of. So I laid down again awhile. Then when I did get going, I must of fainted. But that's awful funny. I never fainted before in my life, except when I was"—she looked delicately at Skip—"when I was—that way—"

And then, forgetting everything else, her appalled eyes sought mine. With terrible knowledge, Enid and I stared at each other.

Because, lured by a helpless urge, and by peace and rest and love, Enid had once more entertained Orne who liked to laugh. And once more, she was going to have a quite legitimate baby. . . .

10. *The Man from the Finance*

FROM AND I HAD INTERVIEWS WITH THE SOCIAL worker, who was terse and scornful. Inclined to say, "What can you do with that kind?" Enid's child was dull, the worker said, and not a good adoption prospect. No, she told us, there just wasn't any provision for women who had too many babies that way—legitimate ones.

Enid herself collapsed with a septic throat under this ordeal, and, in due course, Skip and I both got it. And then, into the welter, Enid's angry old grandfather extended help.

He died.

Word came to Enid and she dragged herself out of bed, bought a sleazy black dress, and plodded off. And, a week or two later, she wrote me a note. Grandmother would be glad to take her in, she said, and she would be able to keep the baby. There was a little money from Grandpa's insurance. Later on, she'd have to work again, and later on, maybe she could come back to us? It had all been so lovely, Enid told me wistfully, out of the dreariness into which she was relapsing, you and the Mister making fun and jolly all the time, and dear Skip and Toby and Betsy. Please don't forget Enid, and don't let the children forget.

I was very happy over this solution for Enid. But I had a heartache and an old problem.

Because, what with my sore throat and my feebleness in general, the house was in terrible order. A by-the-day cleaning woman polished genially at a couple of doors and raked a casual mop across the floor. The eternal laundry question assailed us.

So we ran the advertisement again and a most elegant young woman came smiling to call.

She smelled nice, Skip pointed out afterwards—she smelled, in fact, of Chanel Number Five or a reasonable facsimile.

She wore silks and a draping fur, and she sparkled with gems. A low-pitched, pleasant voice was blessed surcease from the screaming accents and slurred vowels that Skip and Toby always picked up so promptly.

Her name, she told me, was Rillicent.

I said, hopefully, “Millicent?” because I was always hard put to it to believe the names of these girls.

She trilled rebuking laughter.

“No, that’s what everybody thinks. That’s a very common name, isn’t it? Mine is Rillicent, with an ‘R.’ I love an unusual name, don’t you?”

We exchanged views for a time and then, feeling very crass, I guided the conversation to the matter in hand. Rillicent laughed again.

“Well, it’s funny. It’s just *funny*—me considering housework. I’ve been employed as a telephone operator. A very good position. But my fiancé”—she glanced down at the monstrous diamond on her third finger—“my fiancé didn’t like for me to be employed nights. And then, really, when a girl pays all of her room and board and expenses, the salary at the telephone company just isn’t enough.”

I opined, timidly, that I was afraid we paid much less. Rillicent waved a kindly hand, but for a moment something hunted gleamed in her blue eyes under the carefully waved blonde hair.

"No—but I'd have my home and that means so much, don't you think? There's just one thing—"

The one thing was that Rillicent wouldn't like any of her friends to know that she was doing housework. She wondered if I would mind her telling them that I was her aunt?

I should, of course, have delivered a lecture on the dignity of labor. I should have scattered platitudes about the task glorifying itself. But I didn't. I said I'd be Rillicent's aunt to the public, but was she sure she understood about the ironing and the dishes and the dusting?

This was uneasy business, as always. There I was, as Tom always told me, trying to outline a job that amounted virtually to peonage, because I wanted things understood at the beginning. There was the applicant pleasantly putting me in my place—well, she'd work *at* the ironing, she couldn't do more than try, could she? As for the cooking, she made a few plain dishes. I wouldn't—she looked around the undeniably plain-looking room—want anything more than that? As to the children, certainly she would romp with the kiddies and keep them amused.

"About staying nights. . . ."

As to that, she wondered if I'd mind her fiancé coming to call on her? They went out frequently, of course, but she'd tuck the children in first. Lots of the time, however, they just wanted to curl up by the fire and talk.

To me, with the great piles of unfinished laundry weighing on me, and three mealtimes whirling by daily, this seemed at least a usable stopgap. I shouldn't, I thought, mind Rillicent and her affianced, curling by the fire.

The affianced soon disillusioned me on that score.

He was an impossible young man, a scowling, bitter, lazy youth, with a permanent grudge against the world. Percy, Rillicent told me, following me when I tried to

get the baby settled for her nap—Percy hadn't been able to stay in his place of employment. The trouble was, Percy couldn't bring himself to take orders. Now, didn't I see how that was? This fellow—well, really not much more than a laborer—had told Percy what he'd have to do and Percy had told him what he could do with his job.

Percy, in person, told Tom and me all this at great length.

Rillicent introduced him to us with great pride and he settled himself in our one comfortable chair, spread out his feet, and surveyed us with loathing.

"Now," Percy demanded, "will you tell me what right you have to make this little girl work in your kitchen?"

He wasn't, he told us later, one of these socialists, not him. You could see for yourself it wouldn't work. Give a lot of these fellows money, divide everything up the way these radicals wanted you to, and in a year the top guys would have it all just the same. But we'd admit, wouldn't we, that we didn't have any more right to order Rillicent around than she had to order us?

Tom received this odd social philosophy with a vague grin and tried to subside on an uncomfortable chair and read the paper, but Percy went on to give him a digest of the day's news. This stock market crash, Percy said, was all a fake. Just fixed up to let a few fellows corner all the money.

We were reduced, after one or two of these evenings, to going out, perforce, and lurking down at the drugstore to avoid Percy.

Rillicent proudly explained him to me.

She was naively, somewhat touchingly, elated over her conquest of Percy. He was a college fellow, she said. Well, not a college man now, exactly, because there was this prof, he'd picked on Percy from the start, so Percy had just turned on him one day and told him where to head in.

A widowed mother, subsisting on a small income from insurance—"his father's estate," Rillicent described it—supported this lily of the field. She'd sent him to college for a year or two. He had acquired there a smattering of various undigested ideas and he was permanently conditioned against any sort of work at all.

To Rillicent, however, one step removed, as I found, from a haphazard, uneducated, small-town family, he represented wealth, achievement, social standing, and love.

Rillicent herself had had a couple of years of high school and then had come to town to take the telephone operator's course. She fell in with a group of rooming house girls, and had lived from hand to mouth with them, spending every cent of her pay on credit-house clothes. Every week's pay was doled out in tiny batches to meet one or another of these pay-as-you-go demands.

Percy had given her this beautiful engagement ring, it cost two hundred dollars, she told me. And a diamond-set wrist watch arrived for her birthday two weeks after her arrival at our house. She sat about gloating over its splendor while I sorted the laundry and attended to the baby, and she washed the dishes with her fingertips, sheltering the blazing glory as she worked.

"Wasn't it wonderful of Percy?" Rillicent beamed. "You know you can get these lovely things by paying just a little down—but they've been mean to him about the ring. Well, he couldn't pay any more, he lost his position. But he has another one now, so he's right away started paying on this watch."

This was all true, we found. Paying up lapsed installments on the over-priced ring had given Percy's credit a new lease on life and he had promptly put something down on the wrist watch.

Rillicent pattered off on her free afternoon to buy some clothes worthy of this jewelry. She came home bubbling



with merriment—she was ashamed, she said, unfolding a whirl of pale blue silk, to *tell* me what this cost. Now I was to guess—no, *guess*, she insisted, pursuing me as I tried to flee—*guess* what a bargain she'd got.

"Thirty-nine ninety-five," trilled my hired help. "*Imagine!* For a dress like this!"

I was impressed, all right, I was speechless. Once in a long time, I bought a frock that ran as high as twenty dollars. Mostly I spent my shopping time in bargain basements, purchasing little marked-down sweaters and shoes and socks.

I couldn't remember ever owning a dress that cost thirty-nine ninety-five. The gloves, Rillicent said, shaking out a heap of silken fingers—the gloves were really a *scream*. She'd slipped down to the basement—now I wouldn't tell anybody, would I? You can imagine how she'd have felt if any of her friends saw her there—but she'd just dashed in there, and here were these gloves just given away, you might say, so she bought five pairs.

I went to Tom in amazed inquiry. There were the things, sure enough—but Rillicent's whole salary in a month wouldn't pay for them.

Tom knew how it was done—again the elastic credit arrangements, small stores in off neighborhoods, goods marked up to two and three times its value, sucker traps for just such false refinement as our maid represented.

And presently the mail began to come—angry-looking letters, scribbled across with forwarding addresses. Rillicent stuffed them unopened into her pockets, her high spirits sinking for a little while.

She lived in perpetual amazement at my lack of pride. The first time I asked her to do some marketing at the grocery, I found her crimson and dimpled with protest.

"I couldn't ask for *hamburger!*" she gasped. "Oh, I just couldn't. Mrs. McVicker, don't you feel terribly embar-

rassed? And when you buy liver? Well, I'll tell you, could I just stay with the baby while you go? And while you're out, maybe you wouldn't mind buying me some things at the ten-cent store. I just don't like to go in there."

This was all quite true, I told Tom soberly in the evenings when we fled to escape Percy—prostrate on our davenport now, with his twenty-dollar shoes denting the limp upholstery and the account of his latest scornful departure from his job hot on his lips. Tom was inclined to doubt my story about the hamburger and the ten-cent store, but Rillicent only needed to be heard and she was always audible.

The first time I dressed in the knee-length green tulle evening frock for which I had reluctantly paid eight dollars two years previously, Rillicent buzzed about me unhappily. I wasn't wearing *any* diamonds, she protested. Well, I was just going to take her wrist watch, that was sure. And—now I wouldn't get offended, would I? My little ring was pretty for everyday—but Rillicent was just going to insist that I wear hers. I needn't worry about Percy minding because we wouldn't tell him.

The notion of my friends' amazement at my entrance gleaming with gems almost tempted me to accept her offer. But, I objected gravely, the next time they saw me, I wouldn't have the jewels and what would they think then?

This was talk Rillicent understood. But if I could just get Mr. McVicker to realize what a *little* the stores asked for a down payment—

Percy had made one on a Stutz. He roared up to the door to call for Rillicent and that was the last I saw of either of them for two days. They had an accident—quite a substantial accident, I learned later, with the small-down-payment Stutz coming apart and crashing into another car. A very sullen, bandaged, and almost silent

Percy restored our limping maid to us and she retired to lie with a bandage across her head for several days, during which I had to serve her meals in her bedroom.

And, during her absence, the man from the finance came.

An angry, noisy man, bulldozing his way in, shouting loudly. When I had straightened things out, flaming with fury, he was backing down the steps apologetically. But, he said, this was the address they had on these purchases—and the payments weren't being made.

Rillicent, for once alarmed by my rage, wept silently. Those people had no *right* to do that, she said. They told you to buy all you wanted, they urged you to.

Somebody telephoned from the credit store. They were sorry, the voice said, that I had been annoyed. But my niece had given the address, and had given me as reference. They had to be pretty harsh with these girls, I could understand that.

I understood that life with Rillicent was growing impossible. But at the first threat of trouble, she was in such panic that I weakly relented.

"She's in an awful mess, Tom," I worried. "She's bought things all over town. I suppose they probably garnisheed her pay at the telephone company. She has to have us, for actual shelter. Because that terrible boy won't marry her."

He couldn't. His mother, Rillicent explained, had a bad heart. She had an attack whenever Percy spoke of marriage (as well she might, I thought, since she was supporting Percy in uneasy glory on all his down payments, and a pay-as-you-go wife and child would certainly be a bad investment).

I tried a little pep talk.

"Why don't you start a savings account, Rillicent? You and Percy both. Instead of buying all these things—why

don't you save up some money and get a start toward marriage?"

She had a crushing comeback for that. "On what you pay me?" she demanded.

Skip was soberly perturbed about this. Rillicent had explained to her that nothing, *nothing* would make her work at such a menial job except that she needed the place. I paid such a small salary that she couldn't get along, Skip told me, and so she wasn't going to do any extra things, any more than she could help. Large blue eyes severely scanned my face to see what apology I offered for this downtreading of the poor within our gates.

Life became increasingly bleak. We had a blessed relief from Percy, who had been forced to leave town because of damages from the accident—"And only think, the people where he bought the car are actually trying to make him make the payments! And it's smashed completely, it isn't any good at all! Percy certainly told *that* man where to head in." But that man and a representative of the other car involved had come to tell Percy where to head in, he had had to leave town, and his mother had had an attack "with three doctors."

Rillicent, sobbing, had no recourse but to go shopping.

This brought, shortly, a man to the door again.

"Look here, now," shouted this new man from the finance, "you bought a lot of stuff you don't seem willing to pay for. What are you going to do about it?"

Customary tactics, Tom had told me the other time, people employed deliberately to make such embarrassing scenes that the clients paid a few dollars to get rid of them. And it was certainly working. Doors opened all along the street and my neighbors gazed in pleased surprise. Toby came roaring to my rescue swinging a hammer, and Skip retreated, with a wild wail of alarm, to telephone her Daddy.

I got rid of the man at the door and tried, once more, to get rid of Rillicent. She was very little help, even without her emotional upsets. She was persistently shamed by our cheap food, our makeshift furnishings, her own position. I had had to entertain one of her girl friends in the living room while Rillicent dressed elegantly and descended trilling to greet her, calling me "Aunt Sarah."

"You wouldn't make me go *now*?" Rillicent shrieked. "When my fiancé is away and I haven't *anyone*?"

The finance had our telephone number, though, and even Rillicent could see that this was impossible. I asked her to make arrangements for some sort of change. She could stay here, I weakly consented, until she had another job.

This made of her a permanent guest.

With nothing to lose, now that she was dismissed, she abandoned the slightest pretense of work. She lolled about, weeping and writing letters. She tried to read but our library revolted her.

"Don't you have any good books about love?" Rillicent objected. "Look, there's almost nothing here to read. I always say, anyhow, that a lot of these writers just get by because they have big names. Who's that one that they always try to make you read—oh, you know, that fellow that wrote so many of the books? Not good ones a bit, but a lot?"

I suggested a pair of popular novelists but she rejected these. No, no, I'd recognize it if she could only think who it was—wrote all those books—

Again I had to challenge Tom's credulity. Because Rillicent finally thought of the name and came triumphantly to tell me. "Shakespeare," Rillicent mocked. "That's the one."

And then we really shocked her enough to expedite her departure. I came wearily in one afternoon with a

large, bloody, plebeian package of liver and some bargain-basement rompers for Toby. I found Skip red-cheeked and defiant, Rillicent appalled.

"Mrs. McVicker," she told me, "you won't believe it. Skip says you all believe in evolution. That's the most terrible thing I ever heard of. You tell her she's mistaken."

The origin of species was far from my immediate concern as I saw the upset house, the unwashed dishes, the wet and wailing baby, and heard the scream of the telephone bell.

"Skip's quite right," I said tersely. "I haven't time to go into it now, but we believe in certain scientific facts which don't need to have any bearing on religion."

"But the Bible," wailed Rillicent. "The Bible says man is made in the image of God. Now who's to say that God's a monkey?"

Toby gave a wild crow of delight. And Tom, coming home in the twilight, found on the front porch a hopeful new man from the finance, Percy, a door flung open on the shrieking telephone, a crying baby, and me—and Toby, rushing to meet him, shouted joyously, for the whole entertained street to hear, "God's a monkey, Daddy. Hi, Daddy, Daddy, God's a monkey."

11. *Lucinda*

AGAIN THE ATTEMPT TO TIDE THINGS OVER, AGAIN the cleaning women, and the smeared scrub rags and the whole, toppling job to be done.

I did not mind too much seeing my small, abortive career topple. I might have managed, after a time, when I began to grow together again, doing all of the work. But one of my cleaning women made a complaint to me. "My husband's a night watchman," she said. "Makes good money. But ah tells him, he ain't no suhvice to me at all."

That, alas, was the state of my relation to my family. After a day when I had ploughed through the household chores, I snapped at the children. I wept on Tom, if I didn't greet him with a polite form of a hurled rolling pin. I simplified meals down to nibbles. And I put the children to bed earlier and earlier.

Skip brought me little stories and verses. Her big blue eyes blazed with anxiety as she watched me reading them. I had to resist the tendency to say, "Later, Darling." But if I read them, things boiled over. Things burned up. Three dozen eggs that I had shut into the oven for safe-keeping while I put away other groceries, remained there while I heated the oven later to bake a cake. We had to have omelet for supper. And pudding. And egg salad.

Toby stuck a hot little hand in mine and tugged me off

to see a grasshopper. "Funny kitty, Mamma. Looka dat kitty. I not pat the kitty. I stay here. I *fraid* uff it."

At school they were teaching Skip more of that so-called poetry. They wanted her to recite for Christmas, and they were proffering her doggerel. Our volumes of poets were hazards for the dust cloth.

I felt I simply couldn't go on this way. I'd ordered three little souls from somewhere, it was up to me to feed them. Not just their bodies.

I wrote a piece about the University and sold it to *College Humor*. People liked it, it was reprinted here and there, old friends wrote me.

There was a little money again.

The local newspaper sent a man out to take a picture of me and the children, cosily established by the fireplace, me with a book, reading to them. I laughed a short, harsh laugh. They wouldn't have liked the picture of me tidying up the sand table Toby had made on our kitchen floor with Swansdown, while I held Chris with one hand. Or of the time I put the baby buggy on a slope and ran back in the house because I hadn't turned off the electric iron, only to come out and find that the brake hadn't held, on the slope. Betsy was cheerfully resting in the hood of the upside-down carriage, but I didn't come out of that for hours.

The man from the newspaper put a black cloth over his head and Toby shivered politely, recognizing a familiar parlor game.

"O-o-oh," he said. "Man scare Toby."

Life was scaring me. And with such a little help, I felt I could unsnarl it. So I ran the ad again—the new, improved ad—and a pleasant, charming colored girl came out to see me.

I had avoided colored help, not by preference but because the first one or two I had interviewed in the glossy

high-toned postwar days had simply laughed at my offers on wages and work. They were professionals and they had standards, as well they should have. Tom and I knew that all we had to offer at that time was a starting point for an amateur, or refuge for the hopeless.

Now, it was different. Fortunes had fallen. Women were again doing their own work. Anxious men held all the jobs to be found. So some of these trained maids were without places again, and I thought that perhaps, with the upped pay we were offering, we could hire one.

I explained this to Lucinda. Again with that awful frankness Tom deplored, I told her what a terrible job it was. I said we could now pay what seemed to us the current salary, but that for that sum I must have the laundry done and the children cared for.

"But," the girl asked me severely, "how would that be possible for one person?"

I considered. Was it? Well, yes, it was; because, badly as I did it, I got everything handled—including every hour of the children's time, all of my own outside activities, and a small amount of writing. I tried to explain that.

"I thought perhaps you wanted a governess," Lucinda suggested. "I am a college graduate. I had expected to take a position as governess or teacher."

So did so many, many women, in those hard times. Every night the newspaper was full of them. "Wanted, place in refined home, board, room, small salary. Will help as governess. Some light housework." Or, still more hopeful, "Refined woman will accept position in adult home, no hard work or laundry. No cooking." I told Tom, sometimes, that I was going to accept one of these flossy jobs myself.

However, I was sorry about Lucinda. She had gone to college. Her mother had sent her. "It's Mother," she said, telling a whole story in the brief words, "who's done

housework. Always. My father— isn't employed. But Mother sent me to college so I could teach."

It was an ugly reflection on our world that she couldn't teach. I was sorry about it. I was, as Tom was always wearily telling me, inclined to weep over it and accept the blame for the whole social system.

And, once more, the beggar was breaking my heart. I wanted him thrown out. I didn't want Lucinda.

But she wanted to come, alas. The cases of books, the pictures, the Chinese vases attracted this girl as they had not charmed any Refined White Girls at all.

I did what I could to put her off. I showed her the fairly pleasant room that we had finally created on the second floor, brave with chintz and making up in comfort for lack of splendor. It had a little white desk and flying white curtains, a good reading light, a bookcase.

"But," I confessed, "it is up here under the roof and it sometimes gets hot in summer. Now, in the winter, it's comfortable."

She liked it, though. I thought of Mother who always did housework, of Father who wasn't employed, of a girl away at college coming home to the sort of place that is the shame of Middle Western cities.

"Well, Lucinda," I told her, "you think it over. I myself think you should go on trying to get a teaching job. If I knew of one, I'd get it for you."

"I could come as governess for the children."

"But," I explained, "I can't hire a governess. I'm afraid I even want to do the things of that sort for them myself. I'm terribly sorry, but I need a maid, Lucinda, one who will do the hard work."

"Well," she said, her eyes for a moment desperate, "I have to have some things, I *have* to. I need clothes. I need things for Christmas. I must give presents to the girls at

college. My sorority sisters, Mrs. McVicker. I'm in a sorority. I need money. Will you let me try the job?"

I proposed the two weeks' trial, but I was troubled. I wrote a note to a reference she had given me and had an answer.

"I'm sure I couldn't tell you a thing about Lucinda Baker's ability to take charge of your household," this woman wrote. "I remember her as a kinky-haired youngster coming with her mother when she worked here. She kept my children once or twice. Her mother is a fine woman, hard-working, honest, and good. We all depend on her for everything. I thought the girl was away somewhere."

By the time I got this letter with its cruelly revealing words, Lucinda was established. We liked her at once, we liked her cultured manner, her soft voice, her quiet ways. Toby showed some tendency to follow her around, gazing with great interest, and I was a little alarmed for what he might say. But Toby always loved everybody. He called his grandparents "Nanny" and so he called everybody else Nanny too. He shouted "Hi, Nanny" at every middle-aged person who passed, and it hadn't been long since he had told me with pleased surprise, "A black Nanny said hello to me."

But black grandparents would have proved only a pleasing novelty to Toby. Skip's earliest grounding had been in universal brotherhood. I had extolled that when the multiplication tables were still happily unheard of. Little Black Sambo, she had been taught, was rather dark in color obviously because he lived right under the big, bright sun. She observed that I welcomed the effect of the sun on Toby's bare skin and that, from the time Betsy arrived, we browned her like a little pork chop, turning her carefully to do her other side.

However, shortly and unobtrusively, I removed *Little*

Black Sambo from the nursery bookcase, and I hid Skip's double doll that twisted skirts inside out to show a woolly head. I didn't want Lucinda's feelings hurt and it was far too apparent that they were going to be hurt.

The first evening she served our dinner and I noticed that her hands were shaking. I thought she was shy and I asked her a question or two about her family and Tom joined in with interest, because her home town adjoined his.

She said little. But after our meal was cleared away, she brought dishes and laid a dainty place at the dining room table. She got out an embroidered napkin and set the silver carefully. And then Lucinda ate her dinner too.

My throat ached a little. Enid and Mrs. Arnold had enjoyed their meals in the calm comfort of the kitchen. I loved eating there, where I could scrape a couple of eggs directly out of the skillet and add only one plate to the stack of dishes waiting for me. But none of us had found being relegated to the wrong side of that swinging door a stigma. None of us represented a long climb to get back onto the other side.

I went tiptoeing softly on Lucinda's feelings. I held back the comment on how nicely she set her place at table, because that sounded patronizing. I began to go around with a fixed and eagerly placating smile.

God knows I consider an accident of color one of those curiosities of the universe, like the foolish way babies are still dragged into the world. Or teeth. When teeth could so easily have been made in two complete white bands, firmly attached to the jawbone without any nerves in between. . . . There are things like that that I mean to give God pointers on when I go very reluctantly up to have things out with Him. Not least among them do I consider His allowing those aching differences of shade. He

could as well have allowed men to be a clear, cool green or a jolly crimson, all alike.

I would have marched off behind Lucinda bearing a banner to say these things. But I couldn't do much for her at all.

She brought me a carefully prepared eight-hour schedule for the work, and I agreed to it. Inside me, I didn't think it would work. Toby's bowels chose erratic moments for important tasks and the laundry varied in amount. But I was willing to try to keep in bounds.

When she came in firmly and moved the setting on the radio to a high-class colored orchestra, we were surprised, but I asked her if she cared to stay and listen to it. She could, she told me pleasantly, hear it in the dining room while she wrote letters. If it were turned up very loud.

Tom gave me an agonized glance—it was so very loud, and he had things to talk over.

Under the dining room light, Lucinda's head was bowed over her correspondence. There was the pretty white desk upstairs, there was the bright reading lamp. Me, I'm a great one for going happily to bed to read, to write, even to eat. But the aching soul in Lucinda could not permit her to go up under the roof to write.

Guests dropped in and viewed her with surprise. I rather needed the dining room table for the company. We would normally have carried in sandwiches and coffee and gathered around it for cards or just chatter. But Lucinda stayed on in dignified state, so after a while the guests went away unfed.

She wrote letters all the time. And after a while letters arrived for her, letters addressed "Soror Lucinda Baker."

She bought a lot of expensive gifts—dreadfully expensive gifts, they seemed to me—and sat wrapping them night after night, tying them up with lurid papers.

Before she settled to these tasks, she put the children

to bed—Toby was sleeping upstairs now, in the nursery room, where his unusual talents for decorating were not so devastating as on the ground floor. And, chilling with horror, I heard him one night racing out to the door yelling, “Last one up’s a nigger baby!”

There was an awful silence and then fast, excited conversation. I listened, my heart chugging. And then came Toby’s gay cry as he leaped for the steps, “Last one up’s a person of color.”

However, Lucinda was comfortingly clean and dainty in her frilled white aprons. She served meals nicely and I found it possible to consider having a small luncheon for some friends in town for Christmas.

I told her about it, describing the way I wanted it served, and she nodded. She had a serving apron, she said.

The girls came, they admired my children, they were pleasant and flattering about my work. For once I was comfortable about the looks of the one-floor-plan. The table glowed with my wedding silver and linen, and the steaming things Lucinda was preparing in the kitchen smelled delicious.

I went out to tell her that we were ready to eat and found her doubled over and gray.

“I’m sick,” she said. “Oh, I’m awful sick. I’ve got an awful pain.”

My happy exultation ran rapidly away. I asked if she wanted to lie down and looked about for something to hold the hot dishes with. But Lucinda would not give up, she said. She could hold on till after the lunch. She insisted.

So the dishes got onto the table. But there was no avoiding the fact that Lucinda was clutching her side at intervals. I told the sympathetic guests that she was feeling ill and they bestowed kindly glances on her and waded into a joyous discussion of their own ailments. Most of us

had a few obstetrical details that were dear to us and we were off to a delightful start.

We were finishing dessert when the first wild cry came from the kitchen.

I have never heard such screams—I think sometimes now that I hear them still.

One of the girls went with me and we got Lucinda to bed, her face a gray, dripping mask, her hands writhing. It was, without doubt, appendicitis, we all agreed, and Marian called Bill for me.

And then they went away and the party I had anticipated with such joy was abruptly ended.

I didn't think much about it. I was terribly frightened about Lucinda. Her small face against the white pillow was wracked into appalling lines, and her screams were rhythmic and steady.

Bill, coming in, asked a few questions, but we could not get her quiet to hear them. When he suggested a hypodermic, though, she stopped and cried out. No, she said, she didn't want that. She'd let him take her pulse.

He did that, and some other things, and he turned to me in some puzzlement.

"I'm almost sure it isn't appendicitis, Sally. I'll take a blood count, but it's a completely soft abdomen. And there's not enough temperature to mean a rupture. The fact is, I don't know what her symptoms mean."

Well, Bill was always like that. He told us calmly that no such ailments were ever heard of as the ones all his friends told him about in locker rooms and parlors. But he went off, leaving some tablets for Lucinda, and after a while she quieted down and went to sleep.

She was all right the next day. Perfectly all right, I saw to my astonishment. Apologetic over the luncheon and puzzled by her own ailment. No, she said, she never had anything like that before. I was glad enough to find that

the catastrophe I'd feared wasn't happening—hospitalization terrified me, from many standpoints, not the least of them financial. Lucinda was so well, however, that I went out to lunch with my friends, gave a cheery report on my maid, listened to the far more alarming tales of their appendicitis, and forgot the whole thing.

Christmas was approaching and Christmas, with us, has always been a time of tremendous import. We all believe in Santa Claus, who seems heartily to believe in us. Everybody confides about presents, everybody helps fill stockings and trim trees. I shall never forget Skip's appalled face when Tom, being funny, said that his socks had big holes in and the presents would go through.

"A belt won't go through," Toby roared.

I showed Skip the blouse I had bought for Lucinda but she was not very much impressed.

"She has lots nicer things than that for us, Mother. For you, and Daddy and Toby—"

"Oh, she mustn't do that," I gasped, and when Skip said, "Why not?", I realized that I was stopped. Why not, indeed? I, who had cheerily written my brother in China that I wanted at least a mandarin coat stiff with embroideries, into which I could slip to light a cigarette in a long jade holder. I, who blissfully sewed the air with expensive hints. How tell Skip that Lucinda was different—was she?

The whole thing bothered me.

Tom's brother and sister came to town on a shopping trip and arrived for lunch. I told Lucinda to stretch the spaghetti as far as it would go and bake some biscuits. I was describing Skip's prowess in school when I heard it—that fearful, eldritch wail from the kitchen.

And there she was again, Lucinda, stretched across a chair, doubled up.

It was like one of those repetitive nightmares. One of

those dream sequences through which you know your dreary way so well.

We had to call Bill, we had to get her undressed and to bed. Gulping the remains of lunch, upsetting all the plans made for a joint expedition downtown, which included visiting a department store Santa Claus with Skip and Toby.

And Bill, when he came, was terse.

"There's nothing the matter with the girl. Nothing physical."

Well, there it was. We had a long talk, after those pitiful wails had died down. Bill thought little of fancy psychiatric notions but he granted a good, big grain of sense among the siftings.

"It's because she can't bear acting as a menial," I insisted. "Isn't it? She can make out when it's just us. But when outsiders come, it knocks her out. Because she's so fiercely determined not to be a servant, because her whole life is a struggle to advance herself."

Bill smoked a pipe and considered.

"Could be," he said finally. "Although it's odd. I'll tell you—send her to the office tomorrow and I'll give her a thorough examination. And then, why not send the girl home for a vacation over Christmas? Whichever it is, physical or mental, it might clear up then."

So we did better than that, we took her home. We drove her over to the small town where she lived, and the moment we left the city, she sat up, beaming and pleased. She enjoyed the ride into town, the trip that ended at a small, rather ramshackle house on a narrow street. Her father peered out of the door and shouted a welcome, his eyes brightly admiring the car and the state in which she rode.

Her mother, he said, was over to Mis' Daily's, working.

She was doing some night work this week, to get some of those knickknacks the children wanted.

And, presently, she came panting over to greet us. A little, tired, gnarled woman, with a kind, dark face and great, frightened eyes. The eyes went lovingly over Lucinda and then turned on us in pain.

Lucinda, greeting her, was a little cool, a little detached. Already we could see her looking around the house, her lips curling.

I did what I could to reassure them about her health, and we started away.

"But—my job?" Lucinda darted out to demand. "My job?"

"It'll be right there," I promised her.

I turned to Tom, sick with misery, when we drove off.

"Yep," he agreed, "it's a bad set-up. That fine woman there—she's worked herself to a shadow to do it. To push the girl up where she wants to be. And now she's in there, betwixt and between, refusing to come back, unable to go on."

I wailed almost as loud as Lucinda at that, and the children, frightened, cried too, so that we had to keep them up far past their bedtimes, and take turns with Betsy slumbering in her basket while they were shown the glistening windows and stout, beaming Santa Claus.

A Santa Claus who rode over housetops and came down chimneys if the occupants were the right color? I couldn't bear it.

But the actual holiday merrymaking cleared things up. I decided I'd made snow mountains out of molehills. And when a great, jolly troop of Lucinda's family and friends brought her gaily back a week later, I was sure of it.

Until, when she went down to the basement to sort over the clothes for the washing, I heard that terrible cry again. . . .

Bill could give me no help.

"You couldn't do it, Sally—it would hit her with one thing after another. Even if you took over all the mean jobs yourself, even if you were in shape to. Once this complex or whatever it is had its way with her, it would run her and everything around it."

So I had to talk it over with her, plainly. She understood what I meant, her face was thin and hopeless as we talked. And then, after a while, filled with pain and anger.

"I could be a governess to your children."

But she could not. Even if I could, so absurdly, have hired a governess. She would have built into them every wrong distinction, every prejudice, every wall that I wanted them to avoid.

Oh, but there wasn't any answer. Tom and I tried, we talked to people, we wrote letters. Maybe, since those bad days, there has been an advance made. But Lucinda went away from us angry and hurt and left us with damaged self-respect for a long, long time.

12. Jootsie

LET IT NOT BE THOUGHT THAT ALL OF OUR LIFE was a muddle. A happy family, like a happy nation, has no history. So there were weeks and even months when things flowed along. When I felt hearty and took over with some efficiency, when a maid came and stayed a good long time without any eccentricities at all.

In those peaceful periods I wrote frantically. I sold things fairly often, then. And when the inevitable end came, because, "I'm terribly sorry, Mrs. McVicker, I've loved being here, but my mother is sick in bed with heart trouble and I have to go home"—an end which came to one of our cheeriest, sweetest souls—then I had actually *done* some of that writing people asked me about. "Doing any writing lately, Sally? When will we see that little article?" I had proved that I could. And that my efforts in that respect were financially more profitable than my doing housework. And infinitely a better finished product.

One pleasant girl stayed for a whole year and then left to have a husband and baby of her own. We gave her a shower and a wedding dinner and the children went out, in due course, and inspected her shining apartment. (How *did* she do it?) And admired the ensuing baby enormously.

But the blackest depths of the Depression began to show gleams of sunlight. Newspaper salaries were unaffected, however. The better class of houseworkers

moved into much better paid jobs. Or, still better from their own viewpoints, they stopped doing housework at all. They became saleswomen and elevator girls and file clerks.

So once more the procession of belligerent old crones bore down on us.

To add to our problem now, we had at last forsaken the one-floor-plan.

We had, as a matter of fact, given it away to a nice man. That's what it amounted to, when we sifted the land contract that proved to mean that we'd be obliged to pay like rent for sixty years to come. We swallowed the loss that came to property owners in that dismal stretch of toppling financing, and packed up the accumulations of the years. Away they rode forever from the little, young street with the new trees, now fairly grown, and the riveters silent and the redbird gone.

We had small fire engines and dump trucks, doll trunks, high chairs and beds, and Toby's dear seatless job, now as dear to Betsy; we had refrigerators and davenports and stoves and, Tom sighed, rubbing a perspiring forehead, one whole truckload of plain trash that he had to pay to have stowed away in the new house. Because nobody else would do anything about it.

We spread out all over an enormous, old-fashioned house. I couldn't even remember how charmed I'd once been by high, crisscrossed windows (that cost eighty dollars for glass curtains alone). By shining hardwood floors (refinished at vast cost to hide the tracks of midget vehicles). By French doors (every pane a specially cut, expensive replacement).

I looked at the towering ceilings and serenely battered wood of the new house and cried out. *Three* floors. And a genuine attic. Seven bedrooms, and at least one closet for

each. A double garage and an enormous apple tree in a spreading yard.

"We won't know how to fill all this space, ever," I cried.

(In a year, I was to search every nook for a place to stow a file of *Times*, a heap of *New Yorkers*. In six, Betsy was to say indignantly, "If Skip would *ever* get married, I could have her room and wouldn't have to be in that baby sun porch." In seven, Toby was to look around and say, "There's absolutely no place but the living room for the trap drums, Mother, you can see that. They *have* to be next to the piano, so that we can have band practice."

In eight, a school friend, hearing Skip's description of our house, was to say the words that visitors almost always use, automatically, looking around our house, "Did you ever see a play—I think the name of it was *You Can't Take It with You?*")

We took it all with us, the litter and the love, to the big house with a view of the stadium, where Toby began to do a brisk business parking visiting cars, for quarters. But when we started to describe the house to candidates for housework jobs, our tones faltered indeed.

Actually, it's an easier house to look after than the one-floor-plan. You can always shut a few doors, here. Nevertheless, those endless vistas, those sagging staircases, the big, old-fashioned kitchen with a morning-glory growing over the window, the drafty pantry—it wasn't in the mode, distinctly. No black-and-chromium bathrooms. No glistening radiators. Big, old-fashioned mantels over blazing fires on which to hang the Christmas stockings—but no in-a-door beds or whiskaway brooms.

"I don't believe," the maids said, peering at ten little boys chugging through the house to the swing under the tree, "it's the sort of place I'd care for."

So, when Tootsie came, big and blonde and blowsy,

running over with lace and love, I swallowed down a few misgivings and considered.

"Now look," Tootsie said, "while you think if you want me, I'll just damp down them clothes. And wait—just *wait*—till you taste my dumplings."

There sat the washed and unironed clothes, with bites out of them where we'd clawed a few needed garments. Tootsie was rolling them into professional-looking bundles.

"I imagine she has a very kind heart," I told Tom uneasily.

He grinned. "There's room for it," he announced.

We had never met anything quite like Tootsie. The house was big but she overflowed it. Her great, resounding voice, singing lustily. Her thumping footsteps. Her masses of brilliant golden hair. Her genial cries.

Seated at my typewriter, I felt a flailing blow on my shoulder. I jumped and screamed. Tootsie stood over me, radiant.

"You know what you're going to do?" she demanded. "You're going to give me a punch in the nose."

She propelled me ahead of her to the bathroom to show me why. After she'd scrubbed, Tootsie said, she'd just given the bucket a fling, washrag and soap and all, and emptied them into the toilet.

"Then nothing must do me but I try to flush the thing. And I wish you'd look!"

It was a dreary sight, a thoroughgoing, relentless flood. I had to call a plumber. He and Tootsie had a merry time in the bathroom. Uneasily, I listened to shouts of glee from behind its door.

I politely offered to let Tootsie off early on Sunday if she wanted to go to church. I always made that offer. Tootsie screamed. There, now, she said, I'd think she was a case, but by the time she got in Saturday night, she

didn't want to get up for no church. It was this way, Tootsie's brother had a little night club, you might call it. That's where she'd been—workin' as cook, till they shut up the restaurant part because you can't make no money on food.

I was perturbed to think what they were making their money on. I wished heartily that I'd looked up some references before I hired this amazing creature. Nothing had been said about her being off Saturday nights, but when the festive moment arrived, she appeared dressed in flowing pink with feather tips.

"Now I'll tell you what I want you to do," she told me, moving on me in a cloud of Christmas Night scent. "No matter how late I get in—and it will be late—I just want you to yell out and ask me if I lost every last cent in them slot machines. By next week, I'll be making you hold out my pay and don't you let me have it till I'm ready to go shopping, not if I beg and scream at you."

"Oh, Tom," I wailed, "she's impossible. She's fearful. What am I going to do? She's done every bit of the work, even pretty well. The laundry, and the dishes and the sweeping. Toby loves her. But we can't possibly have her around."

Only, how do you tell a jubilant, roaring female that she seems, just a wee bit, perhaps, to lack culture?

Tootsie herself had not the faintest idea that we weren't delighted with her. I risked having some friends in to lunch—that had worked before, in scaring one away. We sat in the living room waiting, and suddenly Tootsie bore down on an out-of-town guest of one of my friends and rammed a spoon into her mouth.

"Taste that," she said. "No, take it all. Now I want you to tell me if you ever et better meat balls than them."

She served wedges of pie with a triumphant flourish and then she left us to the coffee and swept into the front



hall where the telephone stood. And presently Tootsie's thunderous tones rang through the house. "Yes, he is, too, there. Don't give me none of that—none of that stuff. Just tell him to git to that phone."

I rose and shut the door, but there was no shutting out that voice.

Of course I spoke about this. She nodded briskly. "Yes, sir, that was silly of me. Yellin' around like that so you folks couldn't hear yourselves think. My mother always said to me, 'Tootsie, if you could ever keep your big mouth shut, it'd be a whole lot better for you and everybody else.'"

The meals she got were highly seasoned, starchy, digestion-ruining creations. She liked hotly spiced Spanish and Italian dishes. Or chicken simmered richly with heavy dumplings. Masses of pie. Salad, Tootsie considered an odd aberration, although she would fix it if we liked. One evening at dinner, Tom reached for a bite of this, and Tootsie snatched it away from him so fast that it flew across the room.

"Land, I never put that dressing on the stuff," she explained. "'Nother minute, you'd o' had your mouth full of that hay and nothing to make it slide down."

She retrieved the lettuce from the floor and I got up hastily and reached the kitchen just in time to keep her from restoring it to Tom's plate. "Well, land," she said, "you can eat off my floor, it's clean enough."

It really was. But that didn't keep me from dark suspicions of other drawbacks—her insensate need to sample things brewed a horrid thought of Tootsie herself nibbling from the tablespoon as she cooked and then plunging it back into the kettle. I never quite caught her but I was fearful. She cooked with a lighted cigarette extended beside her on the sink, and there was frequently around Tootsie a richer aroma than her seasonings.

Toby, at play one day, rushed through the living room and tripped over her broom. "Gee—," he began furiously, and then, at my scowl, "*-sus*," he finished, triumphant. Well, I'd told them they weren't to say "gee whiz," I'd never thought about Tootsie's vocabulary. "My Sunday School teacher says it," Toby glowered at my correction.

One day when I'd been working hard, with blissfully few interruptions, I heard footsteps rushing up the stairs. In came Tootsie, hat and coat on, shoving Toby ahead of her. They'd obviously been downtown.

"There," she said. "I said you'd never know where we went and you didn't. I knew that baby'd sleep, so I just did Toby up in his things and went shopping. And do you know what that kid done?"

Toby and she both burst into roars of happy laughter.

"I took him to the rest room—he's always havin' to go," she said. "Well, the woman's room was empty so I took him in there. And I was fixin' my hair, never thinkin' a thing. So he comes out and after we've left, here's what he tells me. He locked the booth inside and crawled under—and blessed if he didn't do it with every booth in there. What people's going to think, lined up there for an hour or two—"

Disgracefully, Toby's pleased, waiting face was not disappointed. I thought it was terribly funny and so, that night, did Tom. And I completely forgot to scold Tootsie for going out without permission.

Scolding her was impossible anyhow. Even though I had three great, growing children, I wasn't big enough, or old enough, to cope with Tootsie. She patted me and told me not to worry, not to trouble my head about it. If I complained about her behavior, she joined in with enthusiasm and related far worse things that she did on other occasions.

As to why I didn't say, outright, "You're fired"—ask any

housewife just what moment she would pick to do that—wash day, ironing day, Sunday, the day for the heavy cleaning? Or tomorrow, perhaps? It's like choosing just the right time to start a baby.

Outspoken as she was, with a vivid vocabulary on most subjects, she had, I found, certain reserves. So, when the small female dog she had brought to Toby one day got in trouble, she came shouting for me. (We had said good-bye to Chris and to a piece of our lives and I was clinging to Kipling's adjuration not to "give your heart to a dog to tear," but Tootsie heard that Toby wanted one, so she brought it. A very plain dog, sad, burdened with the woe of her lot.)

These last few days she had become friskier, and now, Tootsie told me, "Them boys are down the street with the dog. There's some big dogs around—and Toby'n them are making a terrible fuss."

Fuss was the word for it. They were two blocks away, screaming, Toby and his friends belaboring the visiting dogs with sticks, neighbors rushing outraged to their front doors. I had to act quickly, so I did. I related the facts of life to Toby at a distance of two streets.

"They're all right," I yelled and Toby yelled back, "They're hurting her, Mother, they're hurting Rusty."

"No, they aren't," I bellowed, "that's the way—they-mate. That's so she'll—*have puppies!*"

Well, it achieved my results but it certainly did not enhance my standing with the neighborhood, nor with Tootsie. "Sayin' a thing like that right out," she exclaimed, turning severely away.

But she forgave me that night when Toby's bed proved to be empty an hour after his bedtime and I screamed for her. She came limping up the stairs—she always limped from some cause or other—and beamed at me.

"Now you come right down here to the cellar," she

ordered, seizing me. "It's the cutest thing you ever seen."

There, curled up together in the cellar, were Toby and Rusty beside a basket which held Toby's pillow. They were sleeping there waiting for the puppies to arrive.

. . . There came a night when Toby's bed was empty and stayed empty. He hadn't come home at all, Tootsie said. The corner where we lived was across from the university campus and miles of open country stretched down to the river. The river. . . . Tootsie was loud and a little belligerent before my white-faced silence. Tom got the car out first and we drove up and down all the streets. We telephoned. We walked around one block and another. Tom said, "Now, Sally—," and then stopped talking at all.

We'd worked hard to instill in Toby that fearless, viking spirit that took him roving all over, that sent him forever experimenting.

He was only three the first time a maid reported to me that he was up in the woods above the house and that he had taken all the matches. That time, I had rushed up to find him and had been greeted by his joyous, "Why, hi, Mother!" Because Toby was always delighted to see me and he never could remember that he was being bad.

So I'd explained to Tootsie, we didn't want to shut him in but she *must* check up on him every hour or two. When I asked her how he could have escaped from her on this terrible evening, she had waved her hand. "He's carrying on all over the place, and I had my house to clean. So I just gave him a pack o' cookies and told him he wasn't to come trampin' in the house once more across my clean floor."

I remembered that speech as Tom and I searched and my insides were aching. "Don't come in this house once more—." There were strange, dreadful stories in the papers all the time, ugly bits of life that sent me the rounds of

my cribs nightly, with my heart thudding. And now my very small boy was out, under a black, clouded sky, with the Olentangy River running along banks where yelling redskins had once trotted. Not a very deep or wide river, but deep enough for such a little boy.

We didn't find him, we had to come home. And it was very dark night indeed when we heard Rusty's bark far off and a weary little figure plodded home. "I thought I'd camp out," he explained. "But we ate the cookies and it lightnined."

I gave him a hot bath and tucked him into Doctor Dentons and then I went downstairs and played the radio very loud and ate two pieces of lemon pie. Tootsie, standing with her hands on her hips, stared at me.

"Well, I must say!" she said. "Once *my* little brother ran away and *my* mother, I wisht you'd of seen her. She screamed and hollered and fainted and had a fit and she never got over it for three full days."

I never lived up to the occasion, in my maids' eyes.

But a Tootsie who sang and swore and smoked and telephoned and kept little boys out-of-doors from her clean floor, could not go on. Next week, I decided, I'd tell her. But Skip said I must be nice to Tootsie.

"She's awfully sad, Mother. She's engaged, you see, to this man Jake. He's awfully handsome."

"Have you seen him, Skip?"

"Oh, my, yes. He comes to see Tootsie nearly every time you're out. They have the radio on and dance—they showed me and Toby how to do the Black Bottom. And he's given her just a lovely ring and a new coat. But they can't get married, you see, because he *is* married."

Skip's tragic tone appalled me.

"But then they shouldn't be together at all," I hopefully advanced the case for conventional morals.

"Oh, but, Mother, his first wife is a terrible person. He

told us so. He says awful things about her. And he truly loves Tootsie, but if that first wife hears of it, she'll make both of them trouble. So, see, she has to go on working for us to make money to fix things up."

A night or so later, Skip came to show me the evening paper. One of the dim little night spots east of town had been raided—slot machines picked up. There had been a brief shooting affray, too, and a woman had been arrested and a man was being hunted.

"Mother, I think that's the name of the place Tootsie used to work at. The Purple Feather. I'm almost sure it is."

Tootsie was silent and red-eyed that evening and for several evenings to come. I had talked the thing over with Tom and we agreed that she must go, but she never gave me an opportunity to approach her. She was always immediately busy upstairs, or outside, and I never had the courage of my convictions.

She rushed upstairs instantly after dinner, which was, at least, a change. My old feeling of social obligation came pushing up.

If her brother was in trouble and Tootsie's world had smashed, did I have the right to smack her down further? When she was working hard and doing her best to climb out of such an environment?

I couldn't be sure. Tom agreed that Tootsie's past and even current morals might be none of our business, but he felt that the children's were, and that such an evident evil example couldn't be harbored. We zigzagged back and forth.

Toby brought the "funnies" to Tom, and then gave a happy crow and pointed to a picture.

"There's Jake!" he yelled. "There's old Jake. Hiya, Boy." The missing gangster from the night club.

I went upstairs and knocked on Tootsie's door. There was no answer. There was, however, a most perceptible

odor—and a much more pronounced one than I had ever noticed before. A strong, rich, alcoholic flavor. The door, when I rattled it, was locked.

I went down and whispered to Tom and he put down the paper and went up. Presently I heard voices—loud voices.

We had found Jake. . . .

13. *A Variety of Persons*

A PRETTY LITTLE GIRL NAMED DOLLY BORE DOWN on us, flourishing my ad, the next time. She said that she felt sure she could please me—she was sixteen, she said, and she couldn't start to college till she was seventeen because of the rules. Meanwhile, she would be glad to help out and earn some money.

She raced over the house with abounding energy. The first night that Tom and I came in from an outing, he walked into the bedroom without switching on the light and I heard a fearful crash. The crash was Tom and the bureau, intertwined on the floor. Dolly hadn't cared for the arrangement of our furniture. She'd put the bureau where Tom's bed had been, and the wardrobe in the corner. She had arranged the beds in a "T" formation and tucked a rocker where it intercepted me as I flew to Tom's rescue, and almost permanently removed an ankle.

"I never like the furniture the same place two weeks in succession," Dolly averred.

She got through mountains of work light-heartedly enough, but she romped with the children like one of their contemporaries. Toby came screaming to my desk, holding out one of his teeth. Dolly was teaching him to play cops and robbers, he wailed through bleeding lips, and she said, "Stick 'em up," and shot him with his little cap pistol.

When Skip planned a birthday luncheon, Dolly entered joyously into the fun. The day of the event, we were astounded to find four additional guests arriving. "They're some friends of mine," Dolly said. "I thought, since I was doing the work, I could as well ask a few people." She supervised the entertainment and awarded a large prize to one of these outlaw visitors, to Skip's appalled, but courteously silent, horror.

I went shopping one afternoon and brought a friend home for dinner.

"It's going to be late," Dolly warned me, hanging down head-first from the landing. "We're playing dress up."

She was dressed in my wedding dress and veil, which she had hauled out of the depths of a cedar chest which hadn't been touched for years. Toby was resplendent in Tom's tuxedo, the newly laundered shirt heavily decorated in crayon designs.

Poor little Dolly, she wasn't waiting to go to college, I discovered. She was an orphan, living with a cold, unloving aunt who was merely troubled and annoyed by her. She had found uninhibited playing with my children the first really joyous fun she'd ever had. When her aunt wanted her back in the quiet house where she lived, she clung to me, sobbing.

So I welcomed the cool detachment of the next arrival. Grace was crimson-cheeked, black-haired, neat, and handsome. She had known a former maid of mine, she told me, and I remembered that family as excellent people in a small-town home. So once more, as I so often did, I dispensed with references and let her "get right at the work," as she offered to do.

With Skip as prematurely grown-up as she had now become, Tom and I had ventured to widen our contacts. There was a bit more money, and, at last, there were friends. We hadn't fitted very well into suburban com-

munity activity. Not long ago one of the newspapers in town ran a little item in its "fifteen years ago" column to the effect that Mrs. McVicker entertained with a bridge party on Wednesday evening. Tom read it and told me about it and I said instantly, "Heavens, has that been fifteen years?" Because that was *the* bridge party, the only one we'd ever had. Skip and Toby had played school for years with the leftover tallies and score cards.

I didn't fit well into organizations, either. But a small group of newspaper people, sitting in a smoky little joint after the paper has been put to bed, can pretty well reorganize the universe in a good, long session. A game of five- and ten-cent limit poker can be, to us, a great deal more fascinating than laboring to win a pair of brass candlesticks wrapped in a gift package.

Religion, the fate of nations, politics, sex—our small gang knew all about all of them. And we could fight till we were shrieking and crimson and enraged, and come again affectionately to fight it out another day.

It was a good crew of people around the paper in those old, lost days. Days before paper shortages and manpower losses, when the eager little cubs from the University came down reciting "Who, What, When, Where" and stayed to grow terse and cynical and sure. On every Friday night in the month, the theater critic and his wife came down to the bar after he had finished his review of the week's movie or the rare stage play, and we argued over whether there would ever be war again.

Of course we were all terribly frustrated. We all knew we ought to be in New York or Paris or London. Writing plays, turning out great novels, seeing life in a rawer version than went on around Broad and High Streets. Maybe, if we hadn't been so happy in those long chats, we'd have done more about going places.

So we were having fun, but once more not in the ac-

cepted manner. If I worked at writing in the daytime, I lived the life of a patient in a pesthouse. There is no lonelier career than the writer's. If I rushed downstairs every time the telephone or doorbell rang, I lost the thread of my story and usually it lost me, because once down I stayed there. If I encouraged the children to come in (which, however, I always did) they stayed and wrote on the typewriter.

If I shut the door and remained apart, by evening I felt like a tardy bomb, I was ready to go off with a loud thud. We had to get out of the house, then—go where I could hear human voices, share human activities.

That meant that the household was turned over, complete, to the incumbent of the maid's job. Grace didn't seem to mind this particularly. She kept things neat enough, although she wrote letters much of the time and was indifferent to very elaborate menus. We did not grow close to her, as we had to many of the wild, strange intruders. She seemed quite content to keep her distance.

When I first began to miss small objects around the house, I accused the children of mislaying them. When I got invited to an important dinner and bought the first hat I'd ever paid over five dollars for, I wore it home and displayed it triumphantly and then put it, I was certain, on the piano.

Grace hadn't seen it there, she told me, but Toby and some of his friends had been in and out all day. We searched the house and then the back yard. Toby declared his complete bafflement. Skip hadn't noticed my hat anywhere.

Tom, unaware of the vital nature of the search, said maybe I'd put it in a closet, I'd certainly never have thought to look there.

But it didn't turn up at all.

A large, luxurious bath towel with a big initial "M" was

the principal occupant of our linen closet. We tried to save it for the company, but Tom was wistfully addicted to it now and then, and when it vanished, I severely accused him. Heavens, no, he said, he hadn't used the towel, he'd used those skimpy little things I always gave him. But Toby's need for unusual equipment was known to all of us. He'd boiled gelatin to print a newspaper, in my best kettle, and then gone fishing, leaving the house to blue and awful fumes and the kettle to ruin. Probably he'd used the towel to equip an igloo.

He said he hadn't.

My traveler brother had sent Skip a carved, miniature box with a tiny wooden elf in it, complete with beard and staff. "He will give you three wishes," he'd written Skip, "but be careful of his staff, it holds most of his magic." Skip, small, sensible wight, had hoarded all the wishes. It never seemed quite time to risk giving one of them up. She'd hoarded the box in a drawer full of treasures, neatly kept in her room.

And now, looking for them to show to a school friend, she found the Swiss things missing.

A little money vanished— I had always been casual about leaving things around. There is a flaw in putting my purse carefully away in a safe place, I never can find it again. Whereas if it's down in the green chair, or on the piano, or the sofa, it is ready to my hand. A quiet, friendly, efficient cleaning woman, one of my many good colored acquaintances through the years, spoke to me anxiously once when I was having a sorority dinner.

"Mrs. McVicker," she said, "with all those girls coming here tonight, I feel I've just got to tell you, you better put your pocketbook away and not have money lying around the way you do. You just can't tell about people."

The total of these silly things that disappeared now, however, was ridiculous. Of course I worried about the

children. I told elaborate fables involving dire punishment wreaked on thieves, and Toby and Betsy listened with interest. But the things vanished on occasions when the children weren't about.

Grace left us for a weekend and I went to her room and stood thoughtfully staring at her closed closet door, at the drawers of her chiffonier. And then I went away again. I couldn't rummage through her things. I couldn't commit an indignity of that sort on a fellow being when I had no evidence, only an ugly suspicion of a kind that rears too quickly.

So they seeped away, the red beads and earrings, Skip's new manicure case, Betsy's glass bank. We had few actual valuables but I began to worry about those, to hunt around for a locked place for my mandarin coat, Betsy's white fur outfit. And that very idea made me shiver.

There came a Saturday of a big football game and we rushed home at noon to get ready to go. And Grace wasn't there. She had gone out, Skip said, telling her to look after Betsy. Gone without permission, knowing that I was having guests for hot oyster stew after the game.

My temper seethed and boiled over. I carted the children off to stay with Mother, a thing I try not to do. I have never felt that becoming a grandmother involves becoming an unpaid auxiliary nurse, and I have severely insisted on doling out the children to their grandparents as luxuries, not chores.

But this time, we deposited them and then I locked the house up good and tight, every door, every window. And we went to the game.

When we got home, bringing the guests along, our front door was standing cheerily open and the table was set. Grace, flitting by, gave me a curious look, but there was nothing to do in the turmoil of food and drink and post-mortems that shouted around us. It was not until very

late that we were alone and I summoned her, endeavoring to look like an outraged queen admonishing a vassal.

It wasn't a very good try. I was flushed with anger and mussed from the game, I was wearing the old bathrobe and house slippers into which I'd got for rest and warmth. Grace was large and serene, well dressed, remote.

Looking at her chill, unresponsive face, I had one of the sickest, most shivery feelings I have ever known. She'd lived among us as one of our family but she hated us, I knew that, although I didn't know why. She was totally alien to us, an enemy. And somehow, looking at her, I got an impression of cold evil that I have rarely known in my life. As though there are people born filled with dislike and greed.

"Grace," I said with dignity, "how did you get into the house today?"

"Through the pantry window," she told me, her large, dark eyes steadily on my face. "I was very surprised that you'd lock me out, Mrs. McVicker. I had an appointment downtown and I was kept late."

I swallowed hard and went to the attack.

"I locked you out principally because I have been very much worried about things disappearing from the house," I told her. "Money and other things have been taken. I wouldn't dream of accusing you of stealing. But— I must ask you now if you know anything about them."

She laughed lightly.

"Why in the world would I want your things?" she asked me, with such scorn that I wilted. "If you'll pay me," she added, "I don't care to stay where people talk to me like this. I'll go now, tonight."

Maybe I was wrong, and the danger was very heavy in my heart. But that impassive ugliness in her manner made me sure. I went for my purse and gave her the full week's salary and she went upstairs. She was up there a

long time, I heard boxes pushed around, I heard drawers shoved out.

When she came down, she had a suitcase and a large parcel.

"What is in the package?" I asked, swallowing.

Her eyes moved over me as though I were a green caterpillar.

"It's something I have to give a friend," she said, and, "No, indeed, I won't open it. It doesn't belong to me."

She flipped into her coat with one backward, insolent glance, and left. And then, too late, I ran upstairs.

She'd emptied drawers everywhere. She'd scooped up Skip's treasures by the armload. She'd taken Betsy's doll. She'd gathered up bright scarfs and Skip's pearl-handled hairbrush.

I flew down and poured out the tale to Tom, gasping and weeping. "You've got to follow her," I insisted. "She won't more than get to the streetcar. Go make her give the things back."

Tom got into the car and departed. Father brought the children home and I had to tell them and see Skip melt into anguish over the loss of her hoards.

An hour or two went by and then Tom came in, grim, flushed, empty-handed.

"I stopped her at the streetcar," he said. "I demanded that she open the bundle. And she said no, she wouldn't. She said she couldn't, that the things didn't belong to her. She said she hadn't touched a thing that wasn't her own. The car came and she got on it. What could I do, Sally? I couldn't lay hands on the girl—scuffle with her."

What he had done was to get in the car and accompany the streetcar, watching for Grace to get off. But he'd never found her.

I went over her room next day and found more strangeness. The letters she had written so steadily had not been

mailed—at least many of them had not. There was a heap of something much like manuscript in her room. Ordinarily I do not read people's letters but I felt airily absolved from scruples in this case, and I was rewarded for my misbehavior by the most surprising discoveries.

She had written about us. Quite a lot about us. "The lady of the house is a writer, with the *best* disposition," she said. (Tom was overcome by that pen portrait.) "The mister," she said, "you couldn't make out, he never seemed to say anything." She acted as secretary, she wrote, reading to me every day from very heavy books. She described her own position in the household as a cross between an admired secretary and a dear sister.

Pages and pages of this—

I wrote her a letter, to her home address, and got no reply. And then I did a cruel thing that hurt me afterwards. I wrote to her mother, whose name we had from that connection with a former maid.

A week later, a box arrived. Inside it was a motley collection of things—my black velvet and sequin hat, dirty and limp, beads and bracelets, a book or two, Skip's box—

Skip fell on it with a cry and then her lip shook. The little man was there but the tip was broken off his magic staff.

That didn't mean the magic was gone, I assured her anxiously, it did probably mean that one wish was used up, that was all.

There was a letter with the box, a note of hurt misery, dignified too. "Grace gave the children the things—she said you sent them to us. I have never known Grace or any of my children to steal, and, oh, my heart is heavy at the thought."

And so was mine. Even while I noted that the hairbrush and the better things were not returned—Grace must have found a use for those.

It was the only time in all our experience that cold, strange malignity came in through our door and dwelt among us. Doctors could diagnose the kleptomania, I suppose, but as to that other thing that lay in Grace's eyes, it came from some icy, hating side of life that we had never known.

In a week or two another young white girl came to interview us and Toby came and planted himself before her.

"Do you steal?" Toby asked her in conversational interest.

Toby always went right to the heart of things.

Geraldine didn't steal and she said so, with indignation. But she was willing to come to work for us and the page flicked over to another of those unbelievable experiences we had in store for us.

She was neatly dressed and clean, soft-voiced and friendly. She had a reference from a woman for whom she'd worked while she was in high school, speaking well of her performance. And she said she loved children and would be glad to look after them.

So I hired her, because once again things were piling up, I had sold some more stories, Skip needed clothes and skates and, actually, an evening dress. I turned over the work to the Refined White Girl and went back up the stairs to write.

14. *Following the Dogs Around*

FOR A TIME, GERALDINE PROVED QUITE ADEQUATE. A week or two went by, with the house superficially slicked up every morning, the meals on time, and the children apparently looked after. As always with the Refined White Girl incumbent, I had proffered full home privileges and Geraldine had professed herself grateful for that, as had her older sister. The sister, a thin, strange-looking creature with bright red hair and an extremely fancy fur coat, had arrived to look us over shortly after Geraldine's installation.

She put a thin, clutching hand on mine and sighed.

"We're orphans, Gerry and I," she said. "We've always had to do things together. Now my husband is leaving town and I just have to go with him. I couldn't leave without my baby sister being settled somewhere nice, and I'm happy about it now. You'll take my place, you'll be a mother to her."

("I'll be no such thing," I thought irately. I could never see why my maternal qualities had to be invoked for these inappropriate daughters. Despite my growing family and passing years, I still went about expecting people to mother me, as continual processions of kind old ladies did. It was always an ugly shock to be invited to reverse this procedure.)

"What does your brother-in-law do?" I asked Geraldine with perfunctory kindness, after her sister had left.

"He follows the dogs," was the amazing answer. This puzzled me extremely. I got a mental picture of a tweedy fellow, pipe in jaws, hunting jacket buttoned up high, hastening through autumn woods or rushing along tree-lined shores, with a pack in a view halloo. But it was an odd occupation and, at the moment, I felt incapable of going farther with it.

Geraldine's voice was pleasantly pitched and she was neat, but she had the customary indifference to the higher reaches of education, and Betsy was beginning to need attention along those lines.

When a mother spends most of her working hours away from home, children are turned over to hirelings for all of their acquaintance with life. And this is a dangerous thing.

We were happy about Skip, we'd sent her to the new school begun by the education department at Ohio State, a progressive school where there would be green blackboards and a magazine called *Buckeye Leaves* and a project system which sounded very fancy.

Toby was always off about his own concerns.

But this left little Betsy to absorb her vocabulary and her habits of thought from the person closest to her. I remembered when Skip, reading vigorously at four, came to tell me an extremely exciting story she had read in one of the magazines the maids brought in.

"So," Skip said, "he went to the doctor and found he was going to die in a year, so naturally he had to live some real life first."

I relegated the meals and cleaning to Geraldine and bought Betsy a set of blocks made in the shape of the letters of the alphabet. She carried them around in a little grape basket and she learned their names immediately and recited them glibly. We found her particularly fetching in her rendition of "W," which she pronounced, with a fascinating flick of a red tongue in and out, "tallerluh."

This got a huge laugh, it brought down the house. We showed her off at a small tea party one afternoon and she went through her act patiently. But more company came and the early arrivals insisted that the grape basket be brought out and Betsy starred again.

She looked at it wearily and then her hands scattered through the irrelevant letters briskly. With a triumphant beam, she brought up the block she was looking for and washed the whole matter up with one triumphant "laller-luh" to end all showing off.

Toby was in school, now, too. Most of the time. That wanderlust that had appeared in him as a baby, however, was never to be curbed by walls. A huge dirigible flew over the town, and the school children were allowed to go out in the yard to look at it. When lunchtime came and I stopped my writing to come down and sit at the table with the children—a custom that I never broke so long as I had a chick arriving for lunch—there came no Toby.

We waited a long time and finally I left Geraldine to watch for him. And then I got out the car and interviewed groups of small boys. From one of them came the clue that tracked him down—and got him some undesirable publicity in the morning paper. "Missing her small son," it said, "Mrs. Thomas McVicker followed a rumor and the dirigible to the air field on the east side of town. There she found her young Toby, leading a group of other air-minded little boys who had planned to stow away on the balloon and leave town."

Clear across a whole big city, Toby had led that shouting expedition. I found them trudging home, footsore and disappointed because the balloon hadn't landed after all. And, as always, Toby greeted me with a happy shout of pleased welcome, without a shadow of apprehension. He had to stay in at recess and noons for a week to pay for that sortie, but he had a fine time doing that, he told me

cheerfully—the teacher gave him an apple and read him some interesting stories.

No one ever held a grudge against Toby once he smiled. But the children's problems grew no less absorbing, and I simply had to turn over the housework to such help as I could count on keeping.

Geraldine relaxed as she seemed to be becoming a permanent resident. She had callers now, in the evenings, and I found them a surprising lot of people.

Gaudy, bleached girls with leopard coats, men with sleek black hair and striped suits. Tom and I, looking at them timidly, slipped away to the Press Club or the office. So the radio went on loudly and a flashy car or two parked outside, and I was somewhat disturbed about the neighbors. We were a pretty big mouthful for that conservative neighborhood to swallow, and we seemed to be giving it more indigestible fodder every day.

"Tom," I asked, "what does 'following the dogs' mean?"

He stared at me. "The greyhound races, of course. The whippet races. It's a big industry. These gamblers follow the races from track to track all over the country. They make enormous killings sometimes."

I said, faintly, "Oh."

My picture of gallant men in pink and racing ladies in breeches faded away. Dear, dear, I was an unsophisticated person, compared with the colorful milieu which the simplest of my hired girls could bring into the picture.

Geraldine, like her predecessor Rillicent, sent me off on errands. She would cram a large bill into my hand as I started out of the house. "Now get me a blouse with that," she instructed. "A really pretty one, not anything cheap. Look around and get a bargain if you can, but anyhow I want it to be nice."

When I said, "What size?", she shrugged. "Oh, take a



good look at me and guess. I don't know exactly, my sister always bought all my things for me."

Those large bills worried me. Among the visitors was one Hal who was particularly sleek and graceful, with a dark, menacing face and a large diamond stickpin. Remembering Jake, whom we were only recently rid of, I attempted to give Geraldine a little talk about propriety in girls' relations with the other sex.

She agreed with me absolutely. "If you let a fellow get away with anything," she said, "there's no stopping him."

Epigrammatically correct, but not consoling. Maybe, I thought wearily, I'd better give Geraldine notice.

But I couldn't do that. Her sister flashed back into town, more wan than ever before, and minus the fur coat. They'd had a perfectly terrible stretch at Miami, she confided in me, clutching my arm and staring out of dark-circled eyes. Why she hated it most was, on account of her baby sister. But she couldn't tell me, she just *couldn't*, how much it helped her to know that Baby was safe and looked after with me.

Well, that was sort of the way we'd planned it in those early, sanguine days of advertising. But this particular set-up left a good bit to be desired.

"Now, look," Genevieve added (she'd told me at once to call her Genevieve, and I think she was expecting a demand from me that she call me Sally, but I remained tongue-tied). "Here's what I want to tell you. There's a fellow that's crazy about Gerry but I don't want her to have a thing to do with him. Well, you know how the world is and I'm going to talk right out to you. He's married."

Genevieve concluded, "We've got to go away and leave her again, because honestly if we don't clean up at the next place, I don't know what's going to happen. But you take care of my little sister for me and you'll get your

reward in Heaven, I can tell you that. Just *make* her behave herself."

This confronted me with an unhappy problem. I was more and more aware that Geraldine was not an occupant likely to bring credit on a household. But did I have the right to withdraw from responsibility once I'd acquired it? Toss Baby to the wolves who were waiting to devour her?

I looked at Skip's pure, serene little face, at Betsy's chubby, gay countenance, and I shuddered. But for the grace of God— No, I couldn't turn Geraldine out, not yet, she was doing what I'd hired her to do and I could certainly summon the stamina to keep her from turning our house into a right gaudy bagnio.

We stayed at home nights for a while. I expected to stem the flow of guests in this way, and did. But only to send Gerry out to join them somewhere else, and this, I felt, wasn't living up to Genevieve's hopes at all. I tried being severe. I told her that I should expect her to stay in, without guests, five nights a week. To which she replied, quite simply, that she'd go clear crazy doing that and she wasn't going to do it.

Besides, this rule brought trouble the very first week. Geraldine put the children to bed, locked her own door, and vanished. Tom and I had gone down to join our newspaper friends, and we were late coming home. When we got to our door, we saw lights gleaming everywhere and the radio, screaming full blast, asked a pertinent question. "*Where?*" wailed the music, "*are you?*"

We hurried in and turned it off and put out the lights and went to bed. Only to wake to a coffeeless and bleak morning with no Geraldine in evidence.

She did not appear all day, and, although I was buried in household affairs, caught with a deadline on my children's stories and no time to do them, and badly involved

in a parent-teacher activity known as Games Night, I was a little relieved. I was glad to be rid of the chore of caring for Geraldine.

But night brought her home. There was another girl with her, a wild-looking blonde with masses of yellow hair to her shoulders and a striped red-and-white jacket.

"Oh," Geraldine burst in upon us. "Oh, Mrs. McVicker, am I ever glad to be back? Guess where I've been! You'll say it serves me right and it does, but you'll never need to tell me again. Mrs. McVicker, this is Lacey Bridges, and she and I have been in jail."

The amazing blonde fluttered stiff black lashes at me and put a hand over a heaving bosom.

"I slipped out," Geraldine told me. "I got the kids to bed and I knew they'd be all right. Goodness, Skip's as old as I was when I was keeping kids for pay." (And this, of course, was true, and punctured badly my aloof disapproval of all of this motherless girl's goings-on.) "I had to go, because Lacey, here, is my best friend and she needed help. Her husband came home just *awful* and he got after her with a gun and she had to have me come right away. I got there in time, but the police heard about it and took us all in."

The guest's name had been digging into my consciousness hard. I was sure I'd heard it. Mrs. Bridges—Mrs. Bridges—I placed it, with a gasp that made Tom stare at me.

Geraldine's reference! The woman in whose home she had stayed and worked. The woman—I don't know what there is about the fact of a home and a married name that produces so instant a picture of a stout, rather dowdy woman of unquestioned respectability. Lacey was married, all right, and perfectly able to write a reference for Gerry, but their maid-employer relationship must have been a somewhat different one from Gerry's and mine!

"They let us go, of course. We'll just have to come and witness against Ken, but one of the boys will get him out of it and he'll blow town. Lacey doesn't want him to take a rap, of course. So I'm going to tuck her up with me in my room and just look after her. And you don't need to worry about me any more, I've learned my lesson. I'm going to stay in and do the way you and Genevieve want me to do. I guess I'm awfully lucky to have you to take care of me. I'm not going to let one of those heels come inside the door again."

Before Tom or I could speak, the two girls went hurrying upstairs.

"Good Lord!" Tom cried out. "Is that what we've been leaving our kids with? We'll get them out of here in the morning."

But I couldn't decide. We'd get Lacey out, of course, although I wasn't even sure I had a right to turn her away. Lacey was just a girl who'd made a mistake in her man. And as for Gerry, who was going to reform, who was going to be all that her sister had trusted me to make of her— I certainly couldn't send her into the howling storm now. Or could I?

Tom said I decidedly could, I have never seen him so firm about anything. He said if I didn't give her notice, he would. And he looked so iron-jawed and fierce about it that I wept wildly and we quarrelled and then, as always happened, our melodrama broke up because, I told him, we'd have the cops in and he'd have to get somebody to go bail for him while he blew town. And who was there among our newspaper friends who could go bail?

I talked to Geraldine next day. All right, she said, looking at me forlornly, she'd send Lacey away. And she 'sposed she'd better pack up and go too. Although she had heard from Genevieve and they'd done very well up

North. If I could let her stay just till Gen got back, she would have somebody to take care of her then.

That wasn't a plea I could ignore. And Halloween was approaching and we'd planned a party. I needed help.

My mother and father had bought and remodeled an old country schoolhouse a few miles from town. It was an enormous place with a bell tower and one gigantic room with a chalk rail all around it and a raised pedestal platform where ghosts of bygone, pinafores children seemed still to be reciting the three R's. It was surrounded by a sweep of acreage with trees and water.

Skip had joined a writer's group at University High School, a rather wonderful little gathering it was to turn out to be. They wrote, and then assembled and read things aloud. They tore each other's work apart with a savagery that would have had me in tears.

The advisory teachers stood wisely by during these sessions and gave counsel only when asked. Tom and I had attended one or two and marveled at the productions of these inspired infants.

So we had planned to have a Halloween meeting for Skip's writers at the "Schoolhouse," and we were all excited about it. I made dozens of miniature mince and pumpkin pies, we bought a few gallons of cider, and Geraldine cooperated by going out with me in advance and sweeping and cleaning the place. She promised me faithfully to stay with the little children and not to have any guests in, so we drove out on the occasion with high and happy hearts.

It was one of those evenings of pure, rare beauty.

The faculty of the new school was made up of eager, brilliant young people, all of them with drastic theories on the reform of formal education. One young man teacher was writing a novel, and he read chapters of it aloud and flushed and smiled and agreed as the children

tore his characters and dialogue apart and made fun of his plot. I stared at Tom. School, we whispered, was never like this.

There was a dark boy with a thin, sensitive face who read a torturing sketch of poignant beauty. There were some childish fancies, prettily elaborated. And there was a guest whom one of the teachers had brought along, a foreigner.

Skip came to tell me about him. He'd travelled all over the continent of Europe, she told me, with the German Youth Movement, after the war. He smiled at us, and exhibited the guitar that had paid his way on that trek. The German Youth Movement and National Socialism were interesting, far away, experimental things to us all and we were enchanted at hearing about them.

So, after the manuscripts were read and the little pies were eaten with even more zest, I played on the parlor organ that Father had found in an auction, and the young German taught us a few of the songs that had inspired a far-off group of youngsters to plan a new world that would have its birth in song.

He was so gay and his songs and tales were so merry. But he had left Europe and the wandering, minstrel life. Strange, dark-browed masters were regimenting that singing youth over there, and they were putting on steel-tipped boots and trampling hard. I shivered at something I saw in his face. But that was far away on a dark continent that could never reach out and touch us.

The guitar player taught us his songs and then, note by note, and gay word by word, we taught him ours. We sang *There Is a Tavern in the Town*. We taught this foreign lad *Across the Field* and *The Buckeye Battle Cry*. We sang his little lieder again, and then he strummed out *The Man on the Flying Trapeze*. It seemed a good

thing to be doing, to teach a German youth the marching songs of a free, proud nation.

The big room was dimly lighted by old-fashioned oil lamps. Music welded us all together in a snug world. We'd never heard of a plane whistling down in flames, and cannons were relics in grass-grown yards.

We drove home very late and a carload of the children swept up after us. They spilled into our house.

"Sam says he must finish the evening with poetry," Skip told me and the dark boy with the earnest eyes rummaged out a volume of Browning. They all curled up by our fireside with mince tarts in their grubby little fists while he read aloud to them. It was an evening of sheer loveliness. We'd laughed a little at the profound pessimism that overhung the stories these children wrote. They laughed at themselves too. They called the newest issue of *Buckeye Leaves* the "Death Number." Jolly little kids, eating and reading aloud. There was no chill whisper to tell us that the boy who'd had to finish the evening with verse was to die fighting in Spain and lie forever in a grave in a land not even his, because he did not care to enjoy the sweetness of a freedom others could not share.

"The happiest evening of my life," Skip yawned her way to bed.

15. *Jenny*

GERALDINE CAME TO ME EARLY THE NEXT MORNING. She was elegant in a thoroughly transparent chiffon blouse, a velvet skirt, two glittering necklaces, and curls.

"I'll tell you what," she said, "I had a letter from Genevieve and did she make me sit up and take notice. She'd heard about all that stuff with Lacey and she was wild. She says I'm to let you make a real lady of me. And here's what I'm going to do. I helped you with your party and I know you'll help me with mine. Next Friday night's my birthday. Ever since I was a little tyke, Gen's given me a party on my birthday and I just don't know what I'd do if I couldn't have one. So she sent me these new things and a wad of money, and she said you'd plan the refreshments and she'd pay for it. I want a lot of those little mince pies and pumpkin ones. And cider, and all."

She stuffed some folded greenbacks into my hand, beamed, and departed. I stood on one foot in despairing uncertainty. Tom would think I was quite, quite mad. But here was a girl who had had a birthday party every year. There had been Skip, face shining and uplifted, "Mother, it's been the happiest evening of my whole life." I sighed and hunted up Betsy to walk with me to the grocery store for more mincemeat.

So I spent a long, arduous afternoon in the kitchen making tarts for the Queen of the Kitchen. She spent the

day dressing. She bathed with clouds of scent. Skip peeked in to ask if she'd be allowed to go to the party too.

"Gerry says it's just like one of those debutante parties, Mother. A coming-out party, she says."

Certainly not a coming out of the kitchen—it was I who did that, tired and aching, just before the first rakish car drove up.

Tom, very disapproving, was going to take me and the children to a movie. It was the only way to counter their outraged determination to share Gerry's fun. "My, I don't mind having them," she said. "Let them come. This fellow of mine's crazy about Toby."

That, I unhappily knew. Just as in the case of Jake, Toby had made ardent friends with one of the sleek-haired youths and twice the boy had called on Toby, ignoring Geraldine entirely while he taught Toby to manipulate the elaborate electric train my wandering brother had sent him.

But I hauled them off to the première of *The Three Little Pigs*, and they forgot everything else in their delight. Noisily singing *Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf*, we returned at eleven o'clock, with the elders of our party hoping the festivities would have ended.

Vain hope! The brilliant electric illumination I had anxiously provided was missing. The room was lighted only by a few grinning pumpkins. There were ominous clusters of dark forms in remote corners. But the radio was uproarious, as always.

I hurried the children up to bed, and then Tom and I tried to read in our own room. He went to sleep at last, and I got absorbed in a mystery novel.

And then the telephone rang. Tom can never wake up without a series of preliminary effects, once he has been asleep, so I got into a bathrobe and went to answer it. I'd forgotten the party, I knew the time was very late,

and I had my invariable attack of the horrors at the sound of a belated phone call.

The voice on the phone was anonymous and it was ugly.

"Is that your car parked outside?" it asked me. "You'd better go and look in it."

Once again, as with Grace, something cold and evil had thrust through into our warmth.

I went in and told Tom about it. He was awake now and he got grimly into his clothes, ignoring my faint pleas to let it all go till morning.

He went and looked in the car. And then he spoke, briefly, to one or two of the guests. The whirring of wheels sounded outside the house for a few moments more and then stillness descended over us.

And in the morning, we told Geraldine she'd have to leave.

Poor Genevieve came to see me the following week. "Who's afraid of the bad ole wuff?" Betsy was caroling. I saw Genevieve's haggard face, disfigured by an unmistakable black eye. Her nervous little hands were gaudy with rings again, they shook as she fingered the flashy fur of her coat. Genevieve was afraid of the bad old wolves but it was too late for her to do anything about it.

"Anyhow," she told me, "I want you to know I appreciate what you tried to do for Baby. You were a real mother to her."

It was a role I was not destined to fill again. Tom said it was the end. We would cope with no more Refined White Girls. Their refinement was of a nature that had permanently got us down. We'd try good, professional colored help, Tom asserted, and if we had to spend most of our income getting a good maid, at any rate we'd avoid being arrested or murdered or forced to leave town.

So I put an ad in the paper and Jenny came. Pretty Jenny, bright and eager, sweet-faced and low-voiced. She was a country girl and, so far as doing the work was concerned, she said she should say she could. She'd done most of the work in her mother's house, where there were eight children and stray uncles and aunts and cousins. "And my grandpa," Jenny said. "And his wife."

She was so clean that she glistened with soapsuds, her clear brown skin and her starched aprons and her crinkled hair. And she flew through the house mopping away the decadent scent of Gerry and her followers.

The first time I heard her cheerful answer to a phone call, "This is Mrs. McVicker's maid," I knew there would be none of the difficulties we had had with Lucinda. To Jenny, being a maid was a fine profession and she was proud of it. I thought my worries were over forever.

If we had been the orthodox family, perhaps they would have been. For now at last we did have a maid who understood her role and was willing to play it. The whole trouble was with us.

Instead of getting up early in the morning and delivering orders for the day, I was pretty likely to sleep on for a while, lulled by the cosy hum of the vacuum sweeper. When I did get up, I set about installing a study on the third floor of the house. There, I explained to Jenny, I was to be undisturbed by any telephone calls, visitors, emergencies.

But Jenny felt free to use her own judgment. "I think you'd better come," she would shout to me. "This lady, she says it's important." So I'd come down two flights of stairs to interview a magazine saleswoman and find my baby Betsy wistful over a game that needed me, and the morning was gone. Once I looked up over my typewriter and found a strange man bringing me a cup of tea—he'd

assured Jenny that making a sample of his product was vitally necessary and she'd sent him along with it.

She was unimpressed with what I chose to call work. I found Betsy anxiously plying a duster one morning, and when I praised her, she pushed back yellow hair with a smudged, hot hand and agreed. "Jenny's teaching me to work hard," she said. "She says she's not going to have me grow up to be a lazy, good-for-nothing person like you."

The house shone. The silver was polished, the furniture dusted. Elegantly spread across the piano was a ruffled boudoir doll which Jenny had given Betsy for her birthday. Now and then I tried to get it absorbed into the doll house, but Jenny rescued it and arranged it in all its magnificence as decoration again, so I gave up. Let my friends wonder about my tastes—we couldn't risk offending Jenny.

All the beds were made by noon, a savory pie stood cooling on the shelf. It was almost the heaven we'd dreamed of long ago.

Almost. But there were still the children. Betsy stole Skip's best collection of bobby pins and did up her doll's curls on them. As Skip kept all of her belongings daintily isolated and set great store by them, there was an ugly scene. A few days later I found Betsy pale and contemplative on the sofa. She hurled herself into my arms and clung to me.

"That man that fires you," she said. "He wouldn't do it just for a few hairpins, would he?"

In Jenny's circles, people were always being fired so I knew this notion must have come from her. What man, I asked Betsy, and what could she be fired from? She explained, burrowing her terrified gold head deep into my shoulder.

"That man that puts you through the fire," she whispered. "Would he burn you up for a few old hairpins?"

So here was the devil back again, rampant and threat-

ening. I had to be very definite indeed about the unlikelihood of eternal punishment for my baby.

"Mother," roared Toby from a deep chair, "what is s-e-x?"

He was reading a Poppy Ott book and I never did find out the origin of that one. But I knew that hiring the best of maids did not yet solve the question of dealing with the children's development and I had to find some method of living that would allow me to write and yet to supply their needs.

Jenny enjoyed planning company meals, so I had a luncheon party at a table beautifully set, adorned with flowers. Toby stayed in the kitchen, hopefully huddled by the dessert, and as Jenny opened the swinging door we heard him singing.

"You're in the army now, you're not behind the plough, you'll never get rich, you son of a gun—" This broke off with a roar of "Mother-r-r!"

"What did you say, darling?"

"I said," Toby's genially distinct accents stormed through the doorway, "I said, Mother, in this song I'm singing—some people sing 'son of a —'" Jenny's foot swung the door to, but the next word came all too clearly. "Don't they, Mother? But we don't, do we, Mother-r-r?"

I could only call back, "No, darling, we certainly don't—" before my guests' mirth submerged us.

Jenny was shocked by such things, but with regard to Skip, she was coldly, definitely unfriendly. Skip's lonely state as a prodigy created an odd situation. She still looked like a little girl, and far too often she acted very naughty and needed good, sharp rebukes. She was passing through a nervous, dangerous peak of time, a child entering her teens. That "one small head" carrying its toppling load of knowledge was far from balanced, as it was to be later by wisdom and maturity.

The maids knew that Skip was much too old for her years. It made them truculent, they wanted, I knew, to "take her down a peg." And she was not tactful by any means nor did she make any attempt to win their devotion. A haughtier young lady of the manor than Skip at thirteen would have been hard to find. She scorned us all. She told me once, "It is a shame I must spend my youth in this sordid manner"—aroused by Toby's spilling ketchup all over the tablecloth and then getting down to lap it up like a puppy.

Tom and I laughed at her. It was, for a short time, hard to live with her.

She was radiantly happy at school, however. And when she announced that she was on the staff of *Tones*, a magazine of verse to be written by her group, I kept reminding her from time to time, "You haven't written your poem yet, and you only have three more days."

So we went to the movies one evening, and when we returned, we found a heap of soiled foolscap outside our bedroom door. "Philosophies in Color," it was headed and it was Skip's poem.

An astounding thing to have come out of the head of a thirteen-year-old. "There are those, and I have known them, who have chosen a philosophy of olive drab and colored all their lives to match—" Tom and I read it, gasping, and I tiptoed up to reassure myself that she was still in her bed. I skidded on an apple core, and found her clothes in an untidy heap on the floor, and somehow took heart from that. I'd always had relatives who assured me that "you'll never raise her."

People heaped masses of praise on her head for "Philosophies." She read it at school and to her grandparents. They were so impressed that they came down in the evening bringing some friends to hear Skip's poem read again.

She went to get it, smiling shyly, and presently she called me.

"Where'd you put it, Mother? It isn't here."

I hadn't had it, I told her, I'd handed it to her when we came back from Mother's.

"Well, I put it right down here on the library table. Right on top of Toby's comic magazine, because I noticed I hadn't read that one."

An icy chill went over me. I'd been through this before, sometime. I rummaged over the table. It was ominously tidy and I knew Jenny's ways. She was, fortunately for us, one of those neat people forever on the move, she could not walk through a room without straightening magazines, tucking away coats and hats in closets, picking up matches.

I called her now and she came in cheerfully. "Yes," she said, "I straightened up that table. Toby'd scattered a mess of stuff all over it. Chewing gum wrappers and a lot of old paper he'd wrote on."

That earlier, awful episode of Tom's birthday presents guided me now to a terrible conclusion.

"What did you do with the paper?"

"Burned it up," Jenny answered. "I had to throw a shovel of coal in the furnace and I took all that mess down with me."

Skip's wail rang through the house.

Of course we hunted. We looked through everything in the room. Tom went to the basement and chopped through the ashes. Jenny was gray and worried, her hands, helping, trembled.

But Skip, shrieking, was a maniac, a terror. Violently hysterical. Jenny had done it on purpose, Skip said. Jenny hated her and always had. No, *no*, she didn't have any copy of it, I knew that very well. She just had a few notes.

Jenny had done it on purpose and Skip was going to kill Jenny now, this minute—

Somehow I got everybody out, sending my parents home, Tom to a meeting, the little children to bed. And then Skip and I sat down at my typewriter. We'd both read the poem a half-dozen times in the day it had been around, Tom and I incredulously rereading it, Mother reading it with us staring over her shoulder, Skip reading it to herself at breakfast and again, aloud, at school.

I remembered whole sections of it and Skip, peering out of black-rimmed eyes, said yes, she remembered some herself.

So, bit by bit, we wrenched it back out of our memory, a slow phrase at a time, a few complete sentences. I gave thanks for Skip's early drilling in silly memory work, "Somebody's Mother," the multiplication tables. When Tom came in at eleven o'clock, Skip and I were perspiration-soaked, limp, and half dead, but the complete manuscript of "Philosophies in Color" was recreated in a heap of typewritten pages on my desk.

"And now," I told Skip, "you are to apologize to Jenny."

She did so, somewhat grumpily, and Jenny ungraciously nodded. But you could see in our maid's haughty manner that we were not the sort of people she would have chosen to work for. All that fuss about some scribbled papers.

I nervously placated Jenny as best I could, because I had never needed domestic peace so badly.

We had our little prodigy full-blown now and we were stuck with her. When, long ago before Skip's birth, I was uneasily worried about some of the legends my mother's friends had passed along about prenatal markings, my doctor Bill had told me a story. There might be something in it, he said. He himself had had a patient who was badly frightened by a bear at the zoo. And when her baby was born, Bill said solemnly, sure enough—it had bare feet.

Maybe our problem was no more acute than this—but Skip was going to be graduated from the University High School at fourteen. And then, the faculty suggested kindly, they'd not advise college. Better let her have a year or two of travel first.

A year or so of travel? With, I assumed, a governess? I felt sure that the faculty didn't quite have in mind the sort of travel we'd been able to provide for Skip, an ancient car crammed with a Sterno stove, a tent, a mass of diapers, a few gallons of gasoline, a couple of battling children, and perhaps a monkey.

No, it would have to be college and I wanted a girl's college. I wanted old, beautiful buildings hung with ivy and tradition, I wanted to rub off the edges of her brash, sharp provincialism. We're a smug lot here in the Middle West; we may grant that people elsewhere do things differently from the way we do them, but we know very well that they don't do them right.

The McVickers were in for a tough fight. Nobody, including the college authorities, would relish the sight of Skip college-bound at fourteen. And there was the almost unscalable financial wall. So I considered Jenny, still efficient and apparently permanent, and I went downtown and rented desk space on the top floor of a rickety building. Enough of this general housework, I was going to be a writer.

I purchased the use of a bare, unprepossessing oak desk in a railed-in cubbyhole for five dollars a month. There, it seemed to me, I could turn out short stories, novels, plays—anyhow, enough extra children's stories to pay for the office and Jenny and leave some over.

I came home one evening to find Jenny very worried. Betsy, she said, was over there playing bridge, all naked, and she wouldn't come home. A reporter friend of ours had had a jolly idea for a feature story using a current

"nudist colony" scandal. Getting Tom's permission, she had settled Betsy and three small neighbor girl friends at a card table in a yard down the street, comfortably playing cards without, as Jenny told me indignantly, "a stitch on." "Columbus Has Own Nudist Colony" was the caption. But after the photographers were through, the little girls, composed as could be about having no clothes on, had firmly refused to break up their card game.

On another return from my world of young princesses and knights, I found the house smoldering in the fumes of burning gelatin. Toby's newspaper, the *Item*, was a colossal success. He'd ruined every kettle in the place, Jenny complained. The wallpaper was covered with blue smudges. And people kept calling up all the time to ask why he hadn't delivered their paper.

There were never enough copies for the demand, for the uneasy neighborhood was agog.

"Mary Douglas has got engaged this week," a succinct social bit declared. "Harry Thomas bought her a ring that cost a hundred dollars, so Harry says." "There was a play given by the seniors of University High School down in Peattie's yard. It was a good play about people in a woods turning into other people. It was by Shakespeare."

Skip had been the heroine of *Midsummer Night's Dream* and she rebuked Toby. "You left out the name of one of the heroes," she said, and Toby answered indignantly, "We put in the little guy that liked you."

Small wonder that the *Item* was popular. "Toby McVicker's father got a raise this week," it said simply. "It wasn't as much of a one as he had hoped for but he was glad to get it." The boys had loads of advertising, ice cream places, hamburger stands, lost-and-found ads. With this gold mine and his profits from parking cars at football time, Toby was a capitalist, as he has always been.

He did a rushing business in puppies whenever Rusty's indiscretions caught up with her.

"Mother," Toby told me one evening, "Jenny has a beau. Gee, he's swell, he wears a uniform and he drives a big Cadillac. He let me work the gears."

Jenny came in, flushed and eager. "Would it be all right if I went out tonight, after I put Betsy to bed?" she asked me.

I innocently thought this would be fine. It would make Jenny less irritable, less inclined to snap at the children and fuss at the swarms of their friends who overflowed her tidy house.

It seemed I could never learn when I was looking at the beginning of the end.

16. *Jenny and Romance*

FOR A TIME, AT LEAST, JENNY WAS HAPPIER. There were more and more evenings when she asked to go out, but I was tired enough to be glad to stay at home much of the time. I was writing desperately. I wrote everything there was to write. I did my monthly stint of "The Primaries were coming to Sunday School all excited" and they paid my office rent and a little toward Jenny. I did my young Colins and Fortunos with their lists and their lances. I found a book on medieval France and reaped a fortune on girls' stories. They flitted about in their crimson satins and their snowy kerchiefs in the great, rush-strewn halls, and the glow of a candle in a castle window lighted up my grubby little desk alcove.

I learned to do little syndicate short stories, one column long, with a snap to the ending. My earnings began to mount slowly, five- and ten- and occasionally twenty-dollar checks adding up to a meager whole.

Then two things happened. Jenny came beaming to speak to me.

"I'm getting married," she told me. "Yes'm, to Henry. Yes'm, next week."

My world wobbled. In the first place, I disliked Henry intensely. He was a mocking, good-looking, debonair youth with a mildly insolent way, and I knew from the children that he led a very fast life indeed. Our Jenny

had come from a tiny farm where barefoot children ran about all day, working hard and loving it. Henry did as little work as he could manage to get by on, he used his employer's car for private purposes much of the time, and he was frequently unkind to Jenny.

There wasn't any use telling Jenny all this.

"I'd like to go on working for you, though," she assured me. "I couldn't stay on the place. But I'd stay till I got the work done up after dinner every night."

Of course I snatched at this, it meant no complete upset of the household then, at once. We gave Jenny a set of dishes and a weekend holiday and she went off with shining radiance in her eyes.

Immediately Skip brought the second piece of news. There was a note on the bulletin board at school about a scholarship to Smith. This was my dream college—I'd read about it in girls' boarding-school books, the catalogue made us glow with delight, President Neilson, that great man, was in the chair.

So we concentrated on getting that scholarship. I combed my hair nicely and went to some of the parties I'd never found time for, so that I'd meet people who knew about collegiate matters. We'd always known the faculty people at the University. They gave Skip a good send-off. All went smoothly, for she got the nomination from the local people.

Her own school, however, pleased with her as it was, still didn't think she should go to college so very young. And she'd have to take the College Board examinations to get into Smith, they pointed out.

We located those examinations, given far across town. And on the first morning, Jenny didn't arrive. She was supposed to come at seven in the morning but Henry's claims came first. I shivered out of bed, slapped a pot of coffee on the stove, buttoned Betsy into makeshift outer

garments, and drove a cold, haughty, and terrified little Skip to take the Board tests.

Jenny arrived, swollen-eyed and silent, at about ten o'clock. I didn't dare scold her, because I had to meet Skip again at noon. So I slipped off cravenly and met my pale-lipped child. The University School had never had exams at all. These great, grim lists alarmed Skip before she began. On the day of the math test, Skip greeted me with shrieks of misery. "There's no use my ever coming back. I didn't answer one question right. I'm disgraced forever. I can't look my teachers in the face again."

I took her to lunch and watched that touching phenomenon all mothers know—a child stuffing away enormous quantities of food while tears pour down and mingle as seasoning. But I forgot to tell Jenny I wasn't coming home to lunch and this affronted her. Next day she didn't arrive at all.

It was Skip's birthday and she spent it gruellingly, working on a survey of all social science. I spent it cleaning the house and making the beds. Jenny spent it with a husband who had thrown her little radio out of the window and knocked out one of her teeth.

I wasn't sure which of us suffered more.

But then there was peace again. Henry gave Jenny a little car. It creaked and rattled, but it was an automobile, and Jenny came trundling proudly up the street in it every morning, parking it beside the house. Skip, the exams behind her, went to a slumber party and forgot them.

Tom and I, however, once more went into a huddle over the budget. A newspaperman's salary, even a good one, is hard put to it to stretch over five coats, five suits, five hats, a dozen pairs of shoes yearly, with food and shelter and recreation to cover all these as well. Now we faced the cost of an eastern college for Skip, as well.

I bought a little china pig bank at the ten-cent store and printed "NEW YORK" on it in large letters. Into it went every penny and nickel and dime I could hoard. I became a curmudgeon, I put my movie money into it. When anyone offered to buy me a drink, I outraged Tom by asking for the cash for my pig instead.

Then Gloria's mother died and she drove her elegant Packard home to the funeral. She insisted that I was to go back with her. It wouldn't cost me a cent, she said, I could stay with her in New York.

So, after a consultation with Jenny, I began to pack.

Then Jenny flew up the stairs.

"There's something terrible the matter with Skip," she said.

I braced myself and Skip, screaming, came thudding up the stairs. She was white as a sheet and she was yelling, "Mother, Mother, Mother—"

"Skip, what is it? Where are you hurt?"

But she was brandishing a letter.

"I *got* it, Mother. I went down to the corner to meet the mailman and I got it."

She had the scholarship from Smith. After an exhausting correspondence which kept stressing, "Do you realize that this child is only fourteen years old?" When they said that all of her references were excellent but her high school authorities said that she was "immature and not experienced enough to enter a large college." After all that, her grades on the exams, math and all, and a copy of "Philosophies in Color," and letters from our nice friends had disposed of Skip.

"At least," Tom said, mopping his forehead when he heard of it, "we've got a down payment on her. Forty-eight more monthly installments and she's ours."

That was up to me. So I set out for New York next day, elegant in my Packard, bedraggled in my old coat, tremu-

lous in my soul. Jenny was conscientious and good and careful, Tom would be there. But I'd never before gone off leaving my babies without me.

I went off with Gloria and her splendor, taking with me, for expenses, my six dollars out of my pig.

I came back a month later with eleven hundred and seventy dollars in cash and checks.

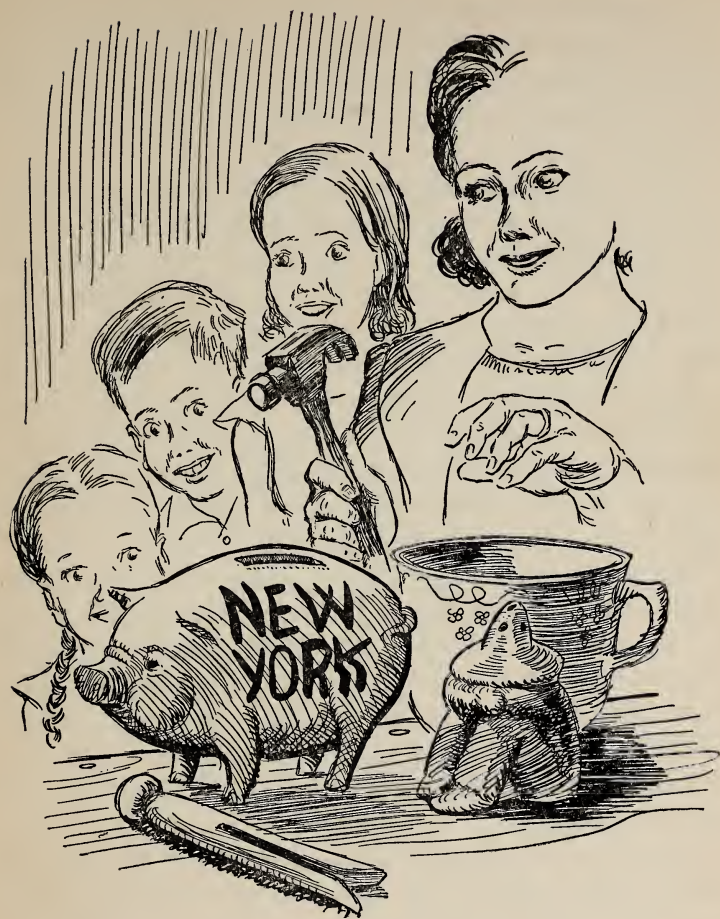
This was my miracle, I don't advise people to try it with much confidence that it can happen.

But I had been shut away for a long time, absorbed in responsibilities, walled in. Now I looked at shimmering towers, glittering avenues, shopwindows, parks—all glory. And I wrote about them with just that bubbling, excited joy. Every story sold—the first week, I sold five of them.

I went to the theater on passes from the paper at home, my heroines went in splendor with admiring suitors. I stared at beautiful clothes and furs in the stores, my heroines could wear everything I saw. And something in this brimming, starry-eyed radiance gave the little tales success.

At the end of a week I moved from Gloria's house to a hotel and wired Tom. "Burn all bridges," I said. "Have hit gold mine." Western Union rendered it, "Burn all britches," and Tom said he thought very probably that was what I wanted him to do, but he'd wait till he saw me to make sure.

There wasn't any warning voice to tell me that such a spurt of success comes seldom in a lifetime. That I would know many a day when I'd look back and wonder how I ever wrote a salable story. Gloria had a party for me and Gloria's charmingly uniformed maid served the dinner most excellently and then, while we all lingered about the table, she went upstairs and stole all of the purses—every purse left by a woman guest with her coat in the bedroom. Then she vanished forever.



Gloria, weeping, asked me a question.

"Sally, do you ever have any trouble with maids?"

I went home triumphant, carrying my spoils, and again, as with that first story, figuring that at the rate of eleven hundred dollars a month, we'd do all right. Skip could have a ski suit to take east with her and Toby could have a bicycle.

My welcome was effusive, although, to my annoyance, the uproar died down quickly. Jenny had, perforce, stayed at nights while I was away and Henry was vociferously displeased. She had preserved a fair state of things. But she had permitted Toby to make advances to a strange dog, which had promptly bitten him and disappeared.

The University Hospital clinic is directly across the street from our house. Many a night I have lain awake clutching the bedclothes at the long, dreary wail of the ambulance siren warning that some mother watches the night out by an empty bedside.

But it has been a convenient refuge for our children. Jenny had smeared Mercurochrome on Toby's wounds but Tom lugged him over to the clinic and the doctors took the episode seriously. So I came home to find Toby with a biweekly date on his schedule, an important look on his face, and some evil punctures in his anatomy.

Now that's what happens, I thought, when I go away and leave them.

But I was an important writer now. I still frugally did the children's stories, but, egged on by my success with penthouses and orchidaceous night clubs, I waded out into the field of purple passion. I was never proud about my writing—show me a potential check, and I have always unlimbered my Corona and gone in to fight. Jingles, syndicate shorts, "confessions," pulp love, articles on how to hold your man—I ran the whole gamut.

The friends with whom we played poker and philosophized, learned to dread a special gleam in my eye. Because everything made copy. My friends' lovebirds produced so elegant a piece that it got cover billing on a magazine, "LOVEBIRDS GO IN PAIRS." My pride in this was somewhat daunted by the friends telling me sadly, "You may be a good writer, Sally, but you're a damn bad ornithologist." And when they saw the illustration, in which two amazing creatures like peacocks bestrode the page, they announced that they would give up lovebirds and try to produce creatures like those on the cover of my story.

Jenny still scorned me, and she was slipping farther and farther away from any interest at all in our household.

Henry traveled with a fast crowd. They made whoopee by night and slept by day. They laughed at Jenny for doing our laundry twice a week, for staying to clean up the kitchen at nights. We ate breakfast later and later, we dined earlier. Once I asked Jenny sardonically if she would like me just to mail her her salary, but the irony fell flat. I could see that she thought it an excellent idea.

In addition to Henry's demands on her time, she had a tremendous number of ailing relatives. The moment one of them felt an ache or pain, Jenny was sent for. A vast hullabaloo ensued. Jenny would go home, to a small town in the southern part of the state, she would ride up triumphantly with the patient, see him installed in the hospital for various excisions, and then spend most of her time there.

We lasted through the summer and in the autumn we actually drove little Skip over to leave her at college. Packing for her, her few sweaters and skirts, the saddle shoes, the one evening dress, heaps of scanty little drawers, I thought suddenly that we must be crazy. What

were we thinking of, to send our little girl away for nine months out of the year, a thousand miles away?

But I had made a vow over each of my children's bassinets, a simple vow—"to have, to love, and in time, let go." It was an awful moment, though, when we turned the car away, there in the beautiful green stretches of Northampton, and looked for the last time at that pitifully small figure staring after us.

When we got back, Jenny came to speak to me.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. McVicker, but Henry's acting up again. And he says I just can't stay nights anymore."

Jenny, troubled as she was, knew our ways and had been with us for a long time. I couldn't let her go. So I had a new idea. I called the University and arranged to hire a girl student. She would occupy one of our many rooms and she would eat with us and in return she'd put the children to bed and stay with them nights.

"Now," I told Tom, "we are bloated capitalists. We have a staff."

It was a peculiar staff. Nancy was terse, self-sufficient. After a few weeks, she brought me an armload of blanks which, to my horror, I saw I was supposed to fill out—just what nights had Nancy spent in, how late did she stay when she went out, how much did she study? The Dean of Women's office required these, Nancy said. "But don't you bother," she added crisply. "You don't know anything about all this. I'll fix them up."

And so, over my all too faint protests, she did. Even though one of those frequent "fiancés" had appeared who occurred so often in our annals. "Since he doesn't live in town," Nancy said, "and he's here so seldom, he'll just stay upstairs here with me. We want to talk all night."

I'm pretty sure that's what they did—

Jenny was happy. Henry had reformed this time, for sure, she said. "We made a down payment on a living

room suite, real nice, upholstered. And he's driving for this store now, so I can buy anything for me I want and charge it to him."

So there we were, with an elegantly arrayed Jenny driving up in her car a little late to get breakfast, a supercilious girl student whisking Betsy to bed, and me with an office, where I had found that miracles happen seldom but hard, day-after-day work will bring about some results.

We branched out again and did a little entertaining. I had a Thanksgiving party for a large group of friends and we made it fancy. Tom has a cleverness with his fingers that has always astounded me, so I planned an elaborate centerpiece representing the landing of the Pilgrims.

Vivid little Indians made of china dolls cavorted around an ocean made of our kitchen mirror, and caped gentlemen were assisting prim, fichued china ladies to step ashore on a neat rock, carefully lettered "1620." (Skip, taken to see the original Plymouth Rock on one of our journeys, said it was nice that the rock had those numbers on it, so the Puritans knew which one to step on.) I had lighted tiny wax tapers, floating in walnut-shell boats filled with water topped by a spoonful of olive oil. They made a fetching illumination around the shore.

But Jenny thought that if the little candles burned in olive oil and water, they'd burn more brightly still without the water.

"Mother," Toby roared inconveniently through my conversation with a guest, "Mother, the dining room—"

I hushed him with a frown. Toby had been excited over the decorations and couldn't wait for everybody to see.

"Mother—you'd better open the dining room door."

I said, in exasperation, "Toby, *hush*."

But he went on with nasty persistence and I sighed. He'd been promised that he could stay up for part of the party if he would "go along up to bed exactly the same as usual when bedtime came, without Jenny even coming to watch him."

I wished we'd never made this promise, but at last I answered him.

"What is it, Toby?"

"I said," he remarked cheerfully, "you better come in the dining room. It's on fire and all those Indians and Puritans are burning up."

So they were—in a handsome conflagration of cotton and paper trees and fichus and capes. Our little pumpkin pies had a sad odor of burning Pilgrims wreathing muggily among them.

And some of my women guests, going up to powder later, found Toby exactly according to the letter of his promise, splashing merrily away in the tub of our only bathroom, leaving the door open for sociability, and scrubbing lustily, if informally, at all his surfaces.

He had a warm faith in all humanity, had Toby.

We laughed at him when Nancy said that Toby wouldn't do his homework, which she was supervising because he had to write the last line to a limerick and win a bicycle. But when he told us cheerily that we could forget about helping out on his savings for a bike because the one he was winning would be along presently, we sighed.

Every noon he rushed home from school to look hopefully on the porch. Tom and I didn't have the heart to tell him that such a contest would have hundreds of answers—thousands of them. That even such an experienced journalist as Toby couldn't count on winning. That—an unpleasant suspicion we kept to ourselves—probably the

whole thing was a gyp anyhow and nobody would get a bicycle.

I came home tired one afternoon and gathered up Betsy, looking around for my small son.

"He went off on that bicycle," Jenny said. "It come today."

A glorified figure came pedaling down the street, weaving in amid the traffic, adroitly skirting a screaming ambulance.

There was Toby and there was the bicycle, "gleaming in crimson and gold." A glorious thing indeed, shipped charges prepaid and absolutely free to Toby as winner of the contest. He wasn't surprised at all.

Of course, a few weeks later, he was knocked off the bicycle and chunks of cinders ground into his knee by a jutting protuberance. He had to go back to the clinic for tetanus shots that brought agonizing hives over every inch of his agonized little person. But he joyously renewed his friendship with the young interns—for many a long year they were to welcome Toby back for more kinds of shots.

Jenny was haughty, these days. It made a lot of work for her, she said, Toby bringing all them kids to ride on his bicycle and tramping through the house. And he was always getting into the pantry and using up the stuff she'd fixed for dinner. I'd have to tell him he was to keep out or she couldn't go on with things.

I was finding out for myself an old, distressing sociological fact that is so disturbing between employer and hireling. I was paying Jenny as much salary for the work now as I had paid her when Skip was home, when Jenny stayed nights, when there was another room and more laundry. And this, instead of filling her with love for me, made her consider me easy and somewhat contemptible. Although I always credited most of these views to Henry and his friends.

She wasn't well—the candle-burning-at-both-ends of Henry's social life was wearing her thin and temperish. Toby quarreled back at her and the house was noisy and unhappy.

She had always taken great pride in dressing Betsy in frilly clothes and taking her out—now, in view of Jenny's dwindling grasp on the household, I thought it best to have Nancy attend to Betsy's airings. So it was Nancy who took Betsy to the hospital to see Tom's sister's new baby, and who brought her in, glowing with her discovery, to where I was sitting entertaining callers.

"Did you see Auntie's little baby, Betsy?" I asked, smiling.

"Yes," Betsy said. "It was nice. It's a colored baby, though."

My callers pricked up their ears.

"Oh, no, it wasn't," I caroled. "You saw one of the others."

"I saw Auntie's baby," she said determinedly. "The nurse brought it in and it ate her. And it's colored."

Nancy, with unfortunate presence of mind, chose this moment to take Betsy upstairs, so there was never any explanation for the agog ladies except, "Quaint what children think up." Betsy herself explained to Tom at dinner that night.

"It's a colored baby, Daddy. It's red."

But Jenny did not, as she used to when she first came, join in our laughter. She served dinner rapidly, frowning, whisking things away before we had finished with them, so that she could slap them together and escape to her own "living room suite." She greeted the instruction to get Skip's room ready for spring vacation with a protruding lower lip. "I thought she wasn't coming," she scowled. "I s'pose that'll mean a lot of parties."

Skip had been home at Christmas, much mellowed by

absence, loving us all very much. And of course welcoming all of the returning Musketeers of the beloved high school class to almost nightly gatherings. Ours has ever been a hospitable house, the door is never locked, and every child has always been welcome to bring in guests.

But we hadn't intended Skip to come for spring vacation, we felt we couldn't afford it. A peculiarly mournful letter from her troubled me, however, and when a neighbor down the street told me that his son was returning from Harvard on the bus and suggested, "Let her come home with Bob, it's very cheap that way," I was tempted. And then began a struggle to the death with the conservative eastern authorities. They wouldn't dream of letting a little girl travel across the whole country on a bus.

So I wrote a politely mendacious letter describing "a very old friend who is coming from Boston," Bob wired, "Arriving wearing long gray beard and two bowie knives to protect you," and the Warden herself saw Skip carefully aboard the dangerous vehicle.

And then all nature went mad. Floods poured over the countryside. Rains lashed, bridges went out, buses vanished. I telephoned Jenny ten times a day from my office, where I was hopelessly trying to earn the fateful bus fare, and Jenny said coldly, "No'm, there isn't any word." When at last she said, "Yes'm, there's a telegram," it turned out to be our telegram to Skip telling her not to start.

"I can't, I can't have my baby Skip drowning and not even know where," I wailed, and Toby said thoughtfully, "Yes, and the Dean at Smith will be awfully cross with you, won't she, Mother?"

But they arrived, at last, exhausted, woebegone, starving.

At Christmas time, they had been impressed with the

new buildings on our campus. What Toby called the "Double Yippy-aye" had worked long and hard, and a strange wooden edifice had grown up complete, from the foundation to the roof, which they had greeted with amazement. Now, worn and battered on this spring homecoming, they peered out through the car window to see what fresh surprise the campus buildings had to offer.

"Goodness," Skip exclaimed, "what *is* that colossal thing? It looks like an igloo for a giant."

The University was getting in order for its spring landscaping and planting. Directly across from our front porch was this magnificent structure. The most enormous pile of manure I have ever seen, as tall as a two-story building.

It was, Skip said, a fitting welcome.

17. *Rainbow's End*

JHERE WAS LOTS OF ENTERTAINING, OF COURSE, AS Jenny had known there would be. And Toby's uproariousness did not vanish. In fact, after one awful evening when Toby did not come home to dinner, and hours of misery and searching went by, climaxed at last by a wistful telegram the next day, "I am all right, Mother and Daddy, but I guess I am in Indianapolis," I began to pay more attention to his demands. He has always been a gay lad, but one who cannot be held too closely within bounds unless there is an outlet for his restless motion every second.

So, when he told us again that he had to have a set of trap drums, we listened.

He had fixed up an array of cigar boxes, tin cans, and pans, and, he pointed out, he'd gone as far as he could on those.

A salesman came out to see us. It was quite out of the question, we told him—two hundred and thirty dollars' worth of them! I poked a thoughtful toe into an accommodating hole in our living room rug and looked at the davenport, which lay supine with part of its insides trailing out of a cushion.

When I said, "But, Toby, where in the world would we put them?" our cause was lost.

We put them in the living room. Callers climbed over them, all of our conversation had to be tuned to roars

above the thudding rhythm of the big bass drum. Now and then—not often—it stopped and we were confronted with the sound of a member of the family shouting at the top of extended lungs, “So I decided to take a *great big physic*.”

Jenny did not care for the drums. Not at all. They got in her way, they were impossible to dust, and the awful noise, she said, like to took the top of her head off. She couldn’t stand all them friends of Toby’s, either, practicing. And there was them cats.

This was Sissy, who had come to us, and who, in all, had seventy-eight kittens. Toby, in his thrifty way, sold the kittens to eager buyers for fifty cents apiece. But there was an intervening period when they had to be kept at home and Sissy carried them about and deposited them in places that she fancied better than the comfortable bed we’d made them in the cellar. The guest room bed, Jenny’s hat box, the flour bin—Jenny wasn’t awfully fond of cats anyhow and she would spring back with a wild shriek when confronted with a cosy heap of them in some totally unexpected place.

And on one occasion, we gave them all away too quickly and they left a whole colony of brisk, starved fleas behind them. It didn’t last long, but the sight of Betsy cautiously reaching for the insect-gun before she would put a pajamaed foot to the floor was definitely, Jenny said, not one bit nice.

She would not resign, and she had been with us a long time. We were very fond of her and I think she loved us as one would love a crew of monsters somehow incautiously begotten. But she became cross and snappy, particularly with the children. Since all of our strange edifice of living had been built on the thesis that the children must be happy, I couldn’t go on.

So, on a dreadful day, Jenny and I parted. We both

cried loudly. We wept and wailed. And we exchanged tear-stained notes afterwards. Jenny would come back, she said, if ever I wanted her, and I said that she was always to be considered a member of our family wherever she went.

But there we were, back where we started from, only worse. A twelve-room house, a double garage, a big yard, children who were growing up, me with a career, such as it was, that was widespread and uncontrollable, masses of laundry to be done, and guests to be fed. *Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush*, Toby's drums thudded out and I shrank before the awful routine—wash on Monday, iron on Tuesday—

And then God, with whom I have always been on excellent terms, sent us Hannah.

He didn't send her directly to me. I went to New York again, to see some editors with whom I'd actually become personally acquainted and to spend a few days' vacation with Skip. I had left on the premises a promising new girl, pleasant and genial enough and apparently not particularly daunted by our household.

Skip met me at the Biltmore. She arrived with some of her good friends who were staying there, and we were to meet in the lobby, where they would register. But I have ever been unfortunate in my public appearances. My agent had told me that a new "confession" magazine wanted a story written around their own title and asked if I would do it. I had gone into the telephone booth to discuss this, but I kept the booth propped open so that I wouldn't miss Skip and her friends when they arrived.

When they did come, however, I was making a note of the title.

"'I Paid for His Kisses,'" I was shouting and then, again to be sure of my uncertain hearing, "*I—Paid—for—His—Kisses.*"

Somebody shoved the door shut with a bang and, looking out, I saw my scarlet little daughter ushering her companions past the booth.

She's long since got over that now—she is a joyous and ribald companion, and she is heartily amused at the tales of her teen-age dignity. But, after all, she muses, it *was* a pretty unusual family—

We saw some plays on our convenient passes, and Gloria's husband had a really bang-up party for Skip at the Rainbow Room, which sent her practically floating out that sixtieth story window.

And then I went home, arriving on an unexpectedly early train.

I went into the kitchen and saw the strange face of a colored woman I had never laid eyes on. I said, "I'm Mrs. McVicker," and I could see she thought it very unlikely. But at last, to my waiting question, she said shyly, "I'm your maid."

And so she was, and I should ask little more of Providence than that she should always be. The girl I had hired had decided, after a time, that it was a little more than she wanted to handle. But she knew a woman recently moved here from "down home" in her southern hills who had been wanting a job. She'd send her up. So Hannah came and, gentle, quiet, retiring, and noble, she has been there ever since. Until . . .

She was frightfully shy. Our booming, uproarious family terrified her. She, too, had been accustomed to the sort of domestic set-up where the lady of the house is very prevalent, pointing out the next object to be dusted, and criticizing the way things were done. She was timid and concerned over my cheery dumping on her the complete responsibility for the whole works. But after her first alarm at this, she asked us if "you-all like hot bread" and went her own competent way.

We did not alarm her. When, one morning, our upstairs doors opened up and thirteen people emerged from them to come to breakfast, she moved the plates around carefully. She stuck on just one point. "I am not going to serve breakfast," she said, "till Miss PerLee is here too." That was the missing face, Skip's friend down the street, and she did draw the line at a second breakfast to encompass her.

We stretched ourselves tentatively in the glow of this sunny peace. We were pretty sure it couldn't be real. When I found that she had a family of her own, I was sure it couldn't be. But she understood about the need for staying nights—even though there were several children crowded into a small, beautifully neat place at home, she could leave them to take care of each other. "I'd be ashamed if I hadn't brought them up so they could," she said, and I flushed a little at an aspersion I'm sure she never meant.

Her husband was a kind, hard-working man, plugging away at a tiny job that paid about five dollars a week. Willing to care for the house and children, too, in his spare time, industrious and gentle but jogged out of the industrial routine.

The years were racing by. I had moved to a somewhat handsomer office—still just a desk in a corner, but in a nice building now, with far too attractive a view out its window. Where I could stare out at the green stretches of the state house yard, and try to think up a plot for a story, and wonder whether it was true that the babies were all grown up.

Not quite. I still had little Betsy, but she was getting very bored with her waist-long yellow curls and every time I was called out of town I saw a gleam in her eyes when they rested on the scissors. In fact, writing a fan letter to a football star, she had expressed this feeling

about herself. She, like all the rest of us, was caught up in the zooming magnificence of the stadium with its bands and its crowds, its colorful "homecoming queens" and parades. One hero in particular won her small heart completely, so she sat down and wrote him a letter.

"Dear Don Scott," she began it. "You may think I am young but I am not. I am eight years old."

Well, none of us were very young any more, and Tom and I were still juggling Indian clubs keeping the ménage moving. "There is no upkeep on trap drums at all," the beaming salesman told us. No upkeep on worn-out rugs, battered furniture, bashed-in tom-toms with forty-dollar replacements necessary, journeys to out-of-town orchestra practices, an old Ford, finally, for transportation for them—

Skip, wiring home, "Dust off the family Phi Bet' key, it has new wearer," won another scholarship at yet another eastern school for a year of graduate study. Well, she had to have it, of course, but we'd been planning to lie quietly down and die when she got her diploma at Smith.

Instead, we packed up the bairns and journeyed over to that commencement, where we gulped with all the others at President Neilson's last day on the platform there. Where Skip marched with the "*Magna cum laude*" group and then ushered us over the lawn to the faculty reception. When we were getting ready to make a pretty flossy speech to the President, we received his hearty handclasp with two whispered words, "Some daughter!"

We went home again and one of her professors, a world-renowned foreign authority, came to teach at Ohio State and we had a party for him. We didn't know just what to do for a man whose name was in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. The simplest thing seemed merely to have the newspaper gang in and let them carry on.

He had a wonderful time that night and so did everybody else. It was such a function as we, certainly, had never had before. We mustered all of our supplies of refreshment, we sent out and got more. Everyone was keyed up that night and very exuberant. The wit soared high and the tumult rang and we tried to forget that the next morning would see all the participants back at work, terribly regretting the heads that they had to take along.

The professor traveled along with us, as heartily entertained as anyone I have ever seen.

And when, in the cold, gray dawn, one of the guests drove him to where he was staying, he turned, shaking his head in amazement.

"Newspaper people," he said, "exactly as in the cinema. And they do this every night!"

We got Skip off to Columbia in the fall and I settled down again to try to earn money enough to finance things. After all, I reflected, although we'd gone through some perilous times, we'd all come through always. And we had Hannah. And nothing could be very bad so long as that was true. I fished through the past for an analogy.

Toby, when he was very small, was quite attached to Betsy's baby buggy, and we were hard put to it to keep him from using it as a delivery truck, wheeling all his friends in it, and coasting in it himself. So it had had hard usage when, one day, I permitted him to wheel Betsy around the block in it.

He decided to take her for quite a long ride, and after a while I saw the procession coming up the hill. Toby was pushing valiantly at great speed. He had no idea that the bottom of the carriage had fallen out quite a distance back. And little year-and-a-half-old Betsy was pattering up the street, her head sticking up out of the buggy, her small feet drumming faster and faster to keep up with this odd ride she had been taken for.

That's the way I felt now—life had given us some tremendous pushes, but so far we could run as fast as it pushed.

And maybe, sometime, it would slow down. And did I want that?

I'm afraid I didn't. None of us did. There was an awful shadow over the world, and Toby, pursing his lips, was talking far too much about something called the Air Corps. In the good old talk sessions, we'd stopped arguing about the impossibility of war. I lay staring at the ceiling at nights after I'd made the rounds of my beds and wondered. What would it be like to hear death raining from the skies on your children and to be unable to say to them, "It's nothing, darling, it's nothing at all. Mother wouldn't let anything hurt you."

I couldn't bear that thought, I had to push it away into some silent dimness. We hung on tighter to those we loved, our good little gang at the Press Club, playing poker sometimes till dawn, breaking it up now and then to ride to a fire right behind the engines, shouting hopefully to the police who tried to stop us, "Press!"

We played cards almost every night with that hilarious crew. Going down after the children were asleep and joining the crowd that came into the Club from the morning paper, eager for relaxation before catching onto odd hours of sleep.

Sometimes the waiters yawned and sighed and closed up, shutting us out. In which case, we were pretty likely, with the winners unwilling to quit while they were ahead and the losers sure of brighter times coming, to go up to our house and play on in our dining room till dawn.

It was good clean fun. Any crowd will tell you that cards and drinking do not mix. And we were severe, devoted players, always terribly annoyed by outlaws who joined us and tried to introduce the vagaries of "baseball"

and "deuces, treys, and one-eyed jacks wild." The two and three dollars we might win or lose was important to us but we loved the game for itself.

I explained this to Hannah after a time.

"I don't want you to think that we're a terribly wild gang, Hannah," I said to her. "We come home at funny times of night, but we're really just sitting quietly at the Press Club, talking or playing cards with people from the morning papers, or reporters on night assignments."

"Gracious," Hannah said, "I don't think anything. I just don't concern myself with that at all."

So, one night very late, I gathered up the crowd and carried them off home with us. For some time I'd warned people who came to sit or eat with us in our dining room that there was a dead man in the ceiling.

Skip and Toby had grown quite fond of him and Skip measured his progress thoughtfully when she returned from school.

He was, actually, a large, dampish spot on the ceiling, of irregular shape, which got long and moist and threatening after a continued rain. My father, that careful property-tender, was shocked at him and had several times tried to find his origin by sending plumbers to take up the floor boards of the bathroom, and to check on the vent pipe to the roof. But we loved our strange-looking corpse in our unseemly way, even though we felt pretty sure that it was written in our stars that he would fall down with a great shattering of plaster, in the middle of some sumptuous feast for elegant guests.

Tonight we got out the silence pad and settled around the table.

We played on and on, and the dawn came without our noticing.

Suddenly there was a terrific crashing at the front door. While we gazed in amazement, men rushed in, hurling a

huge tarpaulin about. They erected ladders, swung pails, clambered about among us.

It was exactly like a Mack Sennett comedy.

With some alarm, the guests scattered to the corners of the room and the men moved the table and began to run up ladders. With a shower of plaster and a great thud, down came the dining room ceiling.

It was an explicable phenomenon. My father, distressed over our situation, had left an order with the plasterers to come "as early as they could get it in" to take off our ceiling and put up a new one. And with "labor what it is," as the employers said, they had sent it now, and it was putting up with no nonsense getting the work done.

The poker players backed into the living room and demoniac chaos reigned where they had been. One small, mustached man mystified us by dashing in through the front door carrying a bucket of plaster. He did this about every five minutes and nobody ever saw him go back out with the empty bucket. As I had dispatched Toby, who had got up wide-eyed and interested, to the grocery for eggs and bread, we always expected the arrival to be Toby, but it was inevitably this same Chaplinesque little figure.

More rains of plaster spattered through the air, more ladders squeaked and chunks of ceiling thudded.

In the midst of all this, I saw Hannah, uniformed and gentle, slip unobtrusively to the kitchen. I went out to speak to her.

"Hannah, would you get us some toast and scrambled eggs?" I asked her. And then, seeing her eyes roam, I added, "Not all these people in the dining room, just the poker players in the living room."

She said yes.

She said a little more, apologetically.

"I didn't want to intrude, Mrs. McVicker," she told me

sweetly. "I waited and I waited—but when they tore the ceiling down, then I thought maybe I better come and see."

And such was Hannah. Always patient with us, always completely unperturbed. In the years she stayed with me, she never once was late to prepare a meal. Never once did I wake in the morning to "no coffee," dim and ugly through the air. Never did she leave, except for the vacation I gave her twice a year, never did she, even for illness or pain, take time off for her own purposes.

The laundry, with Toby adding his mountains of shirts to Tom's (although after a while Tom said I could stop discriminating, they were all Toby's now), with starched little dresses and the ranges of sheets and pillowcases, appeared every Tuesday, perfectly done. We had hot breads for dinner, we had what Toby once wrote me about on a postcard, "ample dumplings for dessert tonight." And southern fried chicken, or yellow noodles, corn fritters, buckwheat cakes, and waffles for breakfast.

If the children had parties, it was all right with Hannah.

Once, after rationing began, I did have a bad moment. One of the photographers from the office was coming to take pictures of the children and I told him he might as well stay for dinner. "Although," I added, "I don't know how much food there will be. I invited my father to come to dinner while Mamma's out of town, and for the first time in history he said he would."

We drove up in front of the house. One of Toby's friends—the one with the Mercury convertible—was already there, quite evidently established for dinner. Down the street, swinging hands with what I now remembered was a prearranged overnight guest, came Betsy. Father, tidied up and shining, was walking toward us, and at



that moment, PerLee came up from her house down on the corner.

Well, that's the way it's always been with us, but I knew an uneasy few minutes.

"I made the hamburger into meat loaf," Hannah told me. "And scrambled up some eggs. I guess, with the biscuits and jam, we'll make out."

And so we did.

Because, from the very beginning, whatever queen reigned in the kitchen, the house has been the children's and I should never lift my head again if ever our door were closed.

Some surprising things came of all this peace—a magazine sent me to Hollywood, all expenses paid. Suddenly the stories were selling faster than I could write them. Skip got a job, and ten people stayed all night in the house, ate breakfast in the morning, and drove her triumphantly to take it the next day.

Toby was looking at uniforms—I had to shut that hard away and not know about it. Not yet, not *yet*—

But at any rate, I was beautifully set now and a great love filled me for all the world.

I decided to raise Hannah's pay. I went to the kitchen on Sunday morning to do it. The family were gathered around the table, casting somewhat reproving glances at my costume. I have a large, handsome, all-enveloping quilted bathrobe which I love. Other days than Sunday, I have to dress for the street when I dress, because I go downtown to work. Not for me the freedom of a house coat and flapping slippers and uncombed hair.

So I make up for it on Sunday, I put on this bathrobe and nothing else at all. Since it arrived after the zipper shortage, it fastens by a loop and a great deal of will power, and the family pretends much concern about it, particularly when, as there always is, there is company.

I was attired in this on the morning when I suddenly thought, as I ate a delicious bite of griddlecake, that I must give Hannah a raise

I went out to the kitchen and told her so. I said quite a lot. I had invented a pretty little speech and I made it with dignity. Hannah made an equally pleasant and flowery speech back and we regarded one another with admiration.

Then I turned and moved haughtily into the dining room.

The swinging door closed on my bathrobe and took it off. Stark naked I marched toward my helpless and screaming family.

And I had to go back into the kitchen, where Hannah was standing in some surprise, and get my bathrobe and put it back on.

It was ever thus with me when I tried to be impressive.

However, things moved on in these smooth grooves and my conscience began to trouble me. Everybody was prosperous. Magazines told us not to spend our money. The stores were crammed with excited customers flourishing greenbacks.

And Hannah's little brood lived on in a clean but tiny cottage, with good, kind Andrew making his five dollars a week.

My uncle was in charge of employment for a huge war plant, hiring hundreds of men all the time. I asked him about it. "Wouldn't you have a job for Andrew?" I asked him. "He's good and honest and temperate, and I imagine he just does this watchman job because he doesn't know how to look for something else."

Uncle Joe said sure, send him around.

So Andrew went and a wonderful thing happened. They



found him a place in the plant and he turned out to have a brilliant knack for which there was a great need.

"He's doing wonderfully," Uncle said. "We should have had him long ago."

Hannah radiated happiness.

She came to me one day, her kind face clouded, her eyes wet.

"What is it, Hannah? Something happened to the children? Anything wrong?"

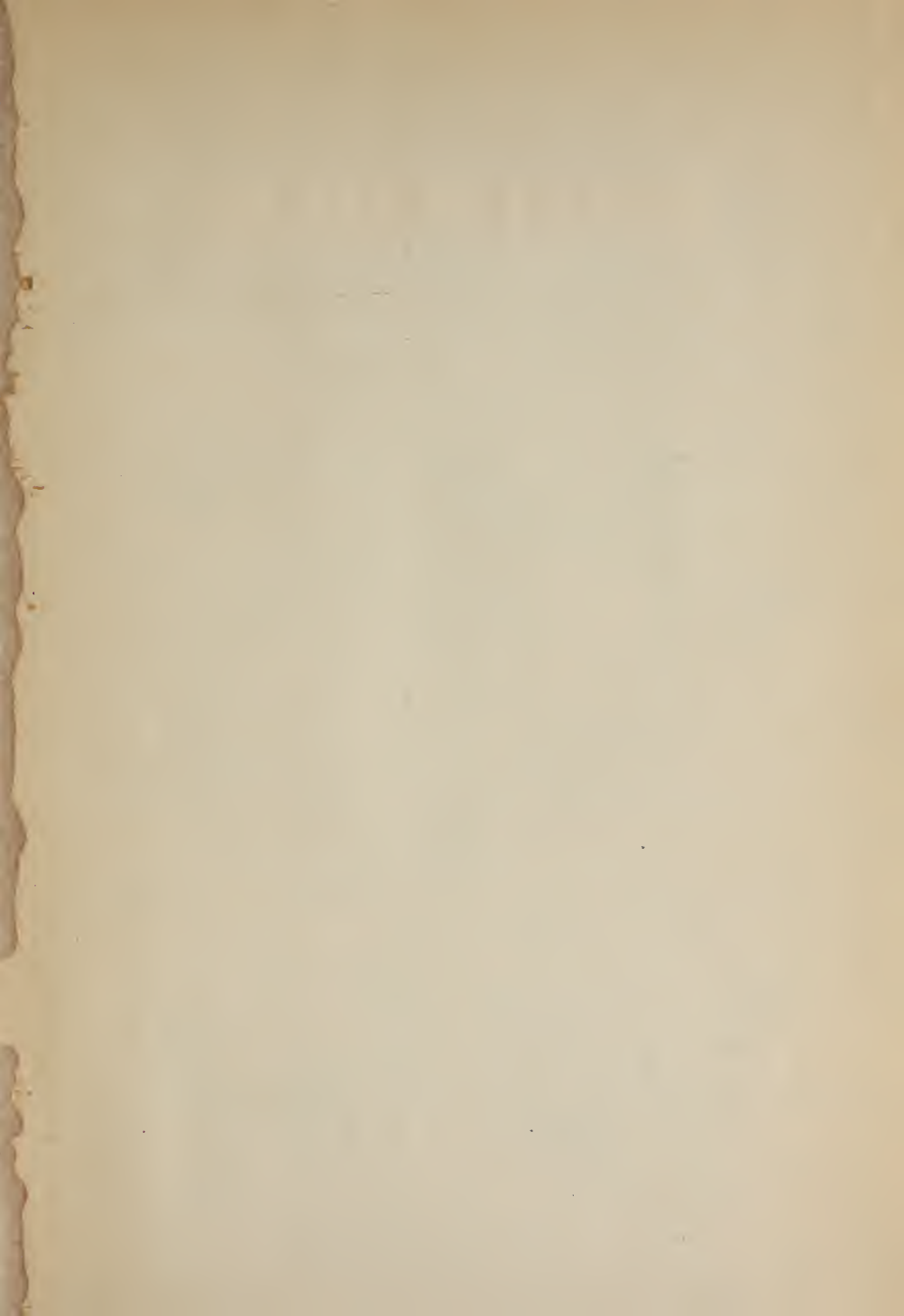
"No," Hannah said. Everything was fine. Just so fine she could hardly bear it. But it was just like this. They'd given Andrew a raise and another and another. He was making thirty-five dollars a week.

"Thirty-five dollars a week!" More than they'd ever heard of in their lives. And they hadn't changed their way of living, money had piled up in rolls.

"And the thing is," Hannah said, "Andrew wants me to stop working. All the years we've been married, I never could. I had to leave my children alone and now I could be with them all the time. I could fix up a house and make it pretty. I could have things for the little ones the way I've always wanted. You know I can scarcely bear to leave here, I love you all and you're my people. But Andrew, he says he wants his wife himself now. I can't bear to say this—but I got to do it. I got to give you two weeks' notice, now."

She patted my shoulder where I sat speechless.

"Never you mind," Hannah said. "Maybe you can advertise and get yourself somebody else."



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The queen was in the kitchen. main
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